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Collected Works



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The Heart of a Goof
Indiscretions of Archie



HERON BOOKS

The Heart Of A Goof
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The Heart of a Goof

TO
MY DAUGHTER
LEONORA
WITHOUT WHOSE NEVER-FAILING
SYMPATHY AND ENCOURAGEMENT
THIS BOOK
WOULD HAVE BEEN FINISHED
IN
HALF THE TIME

PREFACE

BEFORE leading the reader out on to this little nine-hole course, I should like to say a few words on the club-house steps with regard to the criticisms of my earlier book of Golf stories, *The Clicking of Cuthbert*. In the first place, I noticed with regret a disposition on the part of certain writers to speak of Golf as a trivial theme, unworthy of the pen of a thinker. In connection with this, I can only say that right through the ages the mightiest brains have occupied themselves with this noble sport, and that I err, therefore, if I do err, in excellent company.

Apart from the works of such men as James Braid, John Henry Taylor and Horace Hutchinson, we find Publius Syrius not disdaining to give advice on the back-swing ("He gets through too late who goes too fast"); Diogenes describing the emotions of a cheery player at the water-hole ("Be of good cheer. I see land"); and Doctor Watts, who, watching one of his drives from the tee, jotted down the following couplet on the back of his score-card:

*Fly, like a youthful hart or roe,
Over the hills where spices grow.*

And, when we consider that Chaucer, the father of English poetry, inserted in his Squire's Tale the line

Therefore behoveth him a ful long spoone

(though, of course, with the modern rubber-cored ball an iron would have got the same distance) and that Shakespeare himself, speaking querulously in the character of a weak player who held up an impatient foursome, said:

Four rogues in buckram let drive at me

we may, I think, consider these objections answered.

PREFACE

A far more serious grievance which I have against my critics is that many of them confessed to the possession of but the slightest knowledge of the game, and one actually stated in cold print that he did not know what a niblick was. A writer on golf is certainly entitled to be judged by his peers—which, in my own case, means men who do one good drive in six, four reasonable approaches in an eighteen-hole round, and average three putts per green: and I think I am justified in asking of editors that they instruct critics of this book to append their handicaps in brackets at the end of their remarks. By this means the public will be enabled to form a fair estimate of the worth of the volume, and the sting in such critiques as "We laughed heartily while reading these stories—once—at a misprint" will be sensibly diminished by the figures (36) at the bottom of the paragraph. While my elation will be all the greater should the words "A genuine masterpiece" be followed by a simple (scr.).

One final word. The thoughtful reader, comparing this book with *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, will, no doubt, be struck by the poignant depth of feeling which pervades the present volume like the scent of muddy shoes in a locker-room: and it may be that he will conclude that, like so many English writers, I have fallen under the spell of the great Russians.

This is not the case. While it is, of course, true that my style owes much to Dostoievsky, the heart-wringing qualities of such stories as "The Awakening of Rollo Podmarsh" and "Keeping in with Vosper" is due entirely to the fact that I have spent much time recently playing on the National Links at Southampton, Long Island, U.S.A. These links were constructed by an exiled Scot who conceived the dreadful idea of assembling on one course all the really foul holes in Great Britain. It cannot but leave its mark on a man when, after struggling through the Sahara at Sandwich and the Alps at Prestwick, he finds himself faced by the Station-Master's Garden hole at St. Andrew's and knows that the Redan and the Eden are just round the corner. When you turn in a medal score of a hundred and eight on two successive days, you get to know something about Life.

And yet it may be that there are a few gleams of sunshine in the book. If so, it is attributable to the fact that some of it was written before I went to Southampton and immediately after I

PREFACE

had won my first and only trophy—an umbrella in a hotel tournament at Aiken, South Carolina, where, playing to a handicap of sixteen, I went through a field consisting of some of the fattest retired business-men in America like a devouring flame. If we lose the Walker Cup this year, let England remember that.

P. G. WODEHOUSE.

The Sixth Bunker
Addington

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| I The Heart Of A Goof | 1 |
| II High Stakes | 22 |
| III Keeping In With Vosper | 42 |
| IV Chester Forgets Himself | 61 |
| V The Magic Plus Fours | 83 |
| VI The Awakening Of Rollo Podmarsh | 101 |
| VII Rodney Fails To Qualify | 117 |
| VIII Jane Gets Off The Fair Way | 138 |
| IX The Purification Of Rodney Spelvin | 160 |

CHAPTER I

THE HEART OF A GOOF

IT was a morning when all nature shouted "Fore!" The breeze, as it blew gently up from the valley, seemed to bring a message of hope and cheer, whispering of chip-shots holed and brassies landing squarely on the meat. The fairway, as yet unscarred by the irons of a hundred dubs, smiled greenly up at the azure sky; and the sun, peeping above the trees, looked like a giant golf-ball perfectly lofted by the mashie of some unseen god and about to drop dead by the pin of the eighteenth. It was the day of the opening of the course after the long winter, and a crowd of considerable dimensions had collected at the first tee. Plus fours gleamed in the sunshine, and the air was charged with happy anticipation.

In all that gay throng there was but one sad face. It belonged to the man who was waggling his driver over the new ball perched on its little hill of sand. This man seemed careworn, hopeless. He gazed down the fairway, shifted his feet, waggled, gazed down the fairway again, shifted the dogs once more, and waggled afresh. He waggled as Hamlet might have waggled, moodily, irresolutely. Then, at last, he swung, and, taking from his caddie the niblick which the intelligent lad had been holding in readiness from the moment when he had walked on to the tee, trudged wearily off to play his second.

The Oldest Member, who had been observing the scene with a benevolent eye from his favourite chair on the terrace, sighed.

"Poor Jenkinson," he said, "does not improve."

"No," agreed his companion, a young man with open features and a handicap of six. "And yet I happen to know that he has been taking lessons all the winter at one of those indoor places."

"Futile, quite futile," said the Sage with a shake of his snowy head. "There is no wizard living who could make that man go round in an average of sevens. I keep advising him to give up the game."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"You!" cried the young man, raising a shocked and startled face from the driver with which he was toying. "You told him to give up golf! Why I thought——"

"I understand and approve of your horror," said the Oldest Member, gently. "But you must bear in mind that Jenkinson's is not an ordinary case. You know and I know scores of men who have never broken a hundred and twenty in their lives, and yet contrive to be happy, useful members of society. However badly they may play, they are able to forget. But with Jenkinson it is different. He is not one of those who can take it or leave it alone. His only chance of happiness lies in complete abstinence. Jenkinson is a goof."

"A what?"

"A goof," repeated the Sage. "One of those unfortunate beings who have allowed this noblest of sports to get too great a grip upon them, who have permitted it to eat into their souls, like some malignant growth. The goof, you must understand, is not like you and me. He broods. He becomes morbid. His goofery unfits him for the battles of life. Jenkinson, for example, was once a man with a glowing future in the hay, corn, and feed business, but a constant stream of hooks, tops, and slices gradually made him so diffident and mistrustful of himself, that he let opportunity after opportunity slip, with the result that other, sterner, hay, corn, and feed merchants passed him in the race. Every time he had the chance to carry through some big deal in hay, or to execute some flashing *coup* in corn and feed, the fatal diffidence generated by a hundred rotten rounds would undo him. I understand his bankruptcy may be expected at any moment."

"My golly!" said the young man, deeply impressed. "I hope I never become a goof. Do you mean to say there is really no cure except giving up the game?"

The Oldest Member was silent for a while.

"It is curious that you should have asked that question," he said at last, "for only this morning I was thinking of the one case in my experience where a goof was enabled to overcome his deplorable malady. It was owing to a girl, of course. The longer I live, the more I come to see that most things are. But you will, no doubt, wish to hear the story from the beginning."

The young man rose with the startled haste of some wild

THE HEART OF A GOOF

creature, which, wandering through the undergrowth, perceives the trap in his path.

"I should love to," he mumbled, "only I shall be losing my place at the tee."

"The goof in question," said the Sage, attaching himself with quiet firmness to the youth's coat-button, "was a man of about your age, by name Ferdinand Dibble. I knew him well. In fact, it was to me——"

"Some other time, eh?"

"It was to me," proceeded the Sage, placidly, "that he came for sympathy in the great crisis of his life, and I am not ashamed to say that when he had finished laying bare his soul to me there were tears in my eyes. My heart bled for the boy."

"I bet it did. But——"

The Oldest Member pushed him gently back into his seat.

"Golf," he said, "is the Great Mystery. Like some capricious goddess——"

The young man, who had been exhibiting symptoms of feverishness, appeared to become resigned. He sighed softly.

"Did you ever read 'The Ancient Mariner'?" he said.

"Many years ago," said the Oldest Member. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the young man. "It just occurred to me."

Golf (resumed the Oldest Member) is the Great Mystery. Like some capricious goddess, it bestows its favours with what would appear an almost fat-headed lack of method and discrimination. On every side we see big two-fisted he-men floundering round in three figures, stopping every few minutes to let through little shrimps with knock-knees and hollow cheeks, who are tearing off snappy seventy-fours. Giants of finance have to accept a stroke per from their junior clerks. Men capable of governing empires fail to control a small, white ball, which presents no difficulties whatever to others with one ounce more brain than a cuckoo-clock. Mysterious, but there it is. There was no apparent reason why Ferdinand Dibble should not have been a competent golfer. He had strong wrists and a good eye. Nevertheless, the fact remains that he was a dub. And on a certain evening in June I realized that he was also a goof. I

THE HEART OF A GOOF

found it out quite suddenly as the result of a conversation which we had on this very terrace.

I was sitting here that evening thinking of this and that, when by the corner of the club-house I observed young Dibble in conversation with a girl in white. I could not see who she was, for her back was turned. Presently they parted and Ferdinand came slowly across to where I sat. His air was dejected. He had had the boots licked off him earlier in the afternoon by Jimmy Fothergill, and it was to this that I attributed his gloom. I was to find out in a few moments that I was partly but not entirely correct in this surmise. He took the next chair to mine, and for several minutes sat staring moodily down into the valley.

"I've just been talking to Barbara Medway," he said, suddenly breaking the silence.

"Indeed?" I said. "A delightful girl."

"She's going away for the summer to Marvis Bay."

"She will take the sunshine with her."

"You bet she will!" said Ferdinand Dibble, with extraordinary warmth, and there was another long silence.

Presently Ferdinand uttered a hollow groan.

"I love her, dammit!" he muttered brokenly. "Oh, golly, how I love her!"

I was not surprised at his making me the recipient of his confidences like this. Most of the young folk in the place brought their troubles to me sooner or later.

"And does she return your love?"

"I don't know. I haven't asked her."

"Why not? I should have thought the point not without its interest for you."

Ferdinand gnawed the handle of his putter distractedly.

"I haven't the nerve," he burst out at length. "I simply can't summon up the cold gall to ask a girl, least of all an angel like her, to marry me. You see, it's like this. Every time I work myself up to the point of having a dash at it, I go out and get trimmed by someone giving me a stroke a hole. Every time I feel I've mustered up enough pep to propose, I take on a bogey three. Every time I think I'm in good mid-season form for putting my fate to the test, to win or lose it all, something goes all blooey with my swing, and I slice into the rough at every tee. And then my self-confidence leaves me. I become

THE HEART OF A GOOF

nervous, tongue-tied, diffident. I wish to goodness I knew the man who invented this infernal game. I'd strangle him. But I suppose he's been dead for ages. Still, I could go and jump on his grave."

It was at this point that I understood all, and the heart within me sank like lead. The truth was out. Ferdinand Dibble was a goof.

"Come, come, my boy," I said, though feeling the uselessness of any words. "Master this weakness."

"I can't."

"Try!"

"I have tried."

He gnawed his putter again.

"She was asking me just now if I couldn't manage to come to Marvis Bay, too," he said.

"That surely is encouraging? It suggests that she is not entirely indifferent to your society."

"Yes, but what's the use? Do you know," a gleam coming into his eyes for a moment, "I have a feeling that if I could ever beat some really fairly good player—just once—I could bring the thing off." The gleam faded. "But what chance is there of that?"

It was a question which I did not care to answer. I merely patted his shoulder sympathetically, and after a little while he left me and walked away. I was still sitting there, thinking over his hard case, when Barbara Medway came out of the club-house.

She, too, seemed grave and preoccupied, as if there was something on her mind. She took the chair which Ferdinand had vacated, and sighed wearily.

"Have you ever felt," she asked, "that you would like to bang a man on the head with something hard and heavy? With knobs on?"

I said I had sometimes experienced such a desire, and asked if she had any particular man in mind. She seemed to hesitate for a moment before replying, then, apparently, made up her mind to confide in me. My advanced years carry with them certain pleasant compensations, one of which is that nice girls often confide in me. I frequently find myself enrolled as a father-confessor on the most intimate matters by beautiful creatures from whom many a younger man would give his eye-teeth to get a friendly word. Besides, I had known Barbara

since she was a child. Frequently—though not recently—I had given her her evening bath. These things form a bond.

“Why are men such chumps?” she exclaimed.

“You still have not told me who it is that has caused these harsh words. Do I know him?”

“Of course you do. You’ve just been talking to him.”

“Ferdinand Dibble? But why should you wish to bang Ferdinand Dibble on the head with something hard and heavy with knobs on?”

“Because he’s such a goop.”

“You mean a goof?” I queried, wondering how she could have penetrated the unhappy man’s secret.

“No, a goop. A goop is a man who’s in love with a girl and won’t tell her so. I am as certain as I am of anything that Ferdinand is fond of me.”

“Your instinct is unerring. He has just been confiding in me on that very point.”

“Well, why doesn’t he confide in *me*, the poor fish?” cried the high-spirited girl, petulantly flicking a pebble at a passing grasshopper. “I can’t be expected to fling myself into his arms unless he gives some sort of a hint that he’s ready to catch me.”

“Would it help if I were to repeat to him the substance of this conversation of ours?”

“If you breathe a word of it, I’ll never speak to you again,” she cried. “I’d rather die an awful death than have any man think I wanted him so badly that I had to send relays of messengers begging him to marry me.”

I saw her point.

“Then I fear,” I said, gravely, “that there is nothing to be done. One can only wait and hope. It may be that in the years to come Ferdinand Dibble will acquire a nice lissom, wristy swing, with the head kept rigid and the right leg firmly braced and——”

“What are you talking about?”

“I was toying with the hope that some sunny day Ferdinand Dibble would cease to be a goof.”

“You mean a goop?”

“No, a goof. A goof is a man who——” And I went on to explain the peculiar psychological difficulties which lay in the way of any declaration of affection on Ferdinand’s part.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"But I never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life," she ejaculated. "Do you mean to say that he is waiting till he is good at golf before he asks me to marry him?"

"It is not quite so simple as that," I said sadly. "Many bad golfers marry, feeling that a wife's loving solicitude may improve their game. But they are rugged, thick-skinned men, not sensitive and introspective, like Ferdinand. Ferdinand has allowed himself to become morbid. It is one of the chief merits of golf that non-success at the game induces a certain amount of decent humility, which keeps a man from pluming himself too much on any petty triumphs he may achieve in other walks of life; but in all things there is a happy mean, and with Ferdinand this humility has gone too far. It has taken all the spirit out of him. He feels crushed and worthless. He is grateful to caddies when they accept a tip instead of drawing themselves up to their full height and flinging the money in his face."

"Then do you mean that things have got to go on like this for ever?"

I thought for a moment.

"It is a pity," I said, "that you could not have induced Ferdinand to go to Marvis Bay for a month or two."

"Why?"

"Because it seems to me, thinking the thing over, that it is just possible that Marvis Bay might cure him. At the hotel there he would find collected a mob of golfers—I used the term in its broadest sense, to embrace the paralytics and the men who play left-handed—whom even he would be able to beat. When I was last at Marvis Bay, the hotel links were a sort of Sargasso Sea into which had drifted all the pitiful flotsam and jetsam of golf. I have seen things done on that course at which I shuddered and averted my eyes—and I am not a weak man. If Ferdinand can polish up his game so as to go round in a fairly steady hundred and five, I fancy there is hope. But I understand he is not going to Marvis Bay."

"Oh yes, he is," said the girl.

"Indeed! He did not tell me that when we were talking just now."

"He didn't know it then. He will when I have had a few words with him."

And she walked with firm steps back into the club-house.

It has been well said that there are many kinds of golf, beginning at the top with the golf of professionals and the best amateurs and working down through the golf of ossified men to that of Scotch University professors. Until recently this last was looked upon as the lowest possible depth; but nowadays, with the growing popularity of summer hotels, we are able to add a brand still lower, the golf you find at places like Marvis Bay.

To Ferdinand Dibble, coming from a club where the standard of play was rather unusually high, Marvis Bay was a revelation, and for some days after his arrival there he went about dazed, like a man who cannot believe it is really true. To go out on the links at this summer resort was like entering a new world. The hotel was full of stout, middle-aged men, who, after a misspent youth devoted to making money, had taken to a game at which real proficiency can only be acquired by those who start playing in their cradles and keep their weight down. Out on the course each morning you could see representatives of every nightmare style that was ever invented. There was the man who seemed to be attempting to deceive his ball and lull it into a false security by looking away from it and then making a lightning slash in the apparent hope of catching it off its guard. There was the man who wielded his mid-iron like one killing snakes. There was the man who addressed his ball as if he were stroking a cat, the man who drove as if he were cracking a whip, the man who brooded over each shot like one whose heart is bowed down by bad news from home, and the man who scooped with his mashie as if he were ladling soup. By the end of the first week Ferdinand Dibble was the acknowledged champion of the place. He had gone through the entire menagerie like a bullet through a cream puff.

First, scarcely daring to consider the possibility of success, he had taken on the man who tried to catch his ball off its guard and had beaten him five up and four to play. Then, with gradually growing confidence, he tackled in turn the Cat-Stroker, the Whip-Cracker, the Heart Bowed Down, and the Soup-Scooper, and walked all over their faces with spiked shoes. And as these were the leading local amateurs, whose prowess the octogenarians and the men who went round in bath-chairs vainly strove to emulate, Ferdinand Dibble was faced on the eighth morning of his visit by the startling fact that he had no more worlds to conquer. He was monarch of all he surveyed, and, what is more, had won his first trophy, the prize in the

THE HEART OF A GOOF

great medal-play handicap tournament, in which he had nosed in ahead of the field by two strokes, edging out his nearest rival, a venerable old gentleman, by means of a brilliant and unexpected four on the last hole. The prize was a handsome pewter mug, about the size of the old oaken bucket, and Ferdinand used to go to his room immediately after dinner to croon over it like a mother over her child.

You are wondering, no doubt, why, in these circumstances, he did not take advantage of the new spirit of exhilarated pride which had replaced his old humility and instantly propose to Barbara Medway. I will tell you. He did not propose to Barbara because Barbara was not there. At the last moment she had been detained at home to nurse a sick parent and had been compelled to postpone her visit for a couple of weeks. He could, no doubt, have proposed in one of the daily letters which he wrote to her, but somehow, once he started writing, he found that he used up so much space describing his best shots on the links that day that it was difficult to squeeze in a declaration of undying passion. After all, you can hardly cram that sort of thing into a postscript.

He decided, therefore, to wait till she arrived, and meanwhile pursued his conquering course. The longer he waited, the better, in one way, for every morning and afternoon that passed was adding new layers to his self-esteem. Day by day in every way he grew chestier and chestier.

Meanwhile, however, dark clouds were gathering. Sullen mutterings were to be heard in corners of the hotel lounge, and the spirit of revolt was abroad. For Ferdinand's chestiness had not escaped the notice of his defeated rivals. There is nobody so chesty as a normally unchesty man who suddenly becomes chesty, and I am sorry to say that the chestiness which had come to Ferdinand was the aggressive type of chestiness which breeds enemies. He had developed a habit of holding the game up in order to give his opponent advice. The Whip-Cracker had not forgiven, and never would forgive, his well-meant but galling criticism of his back-swing. The Scooper, who had always scooped since the day when, at the age of sixty-four, he subscribed to the Correspondence Course which was to teach him golf in twelve lessons by mail, resented being told by a snip of a boy that the mashie-stroke should be a smooth,

unhurried swing. The Snake-Killer—— But I need not weary you with a detailed recital of these men's grievances; it is enough to say that they all had it in for Ferdinand, and one night, after dinner, they met in the lounge to decide what was to be done about it.

A nasty spirit was displayed by all.

"A mere lad telling me how to use my mashie!" growled the Scooper. "Smooth and unhurried my left eyeball! I get it up, don't I? Well, what more do you want?"

"I keep telling him that mine is the old, full St. Andrew's swing," muttered the Whip-Cracker, between set teeth, "but he won't listen to me."

"He ought to be taken down a peg or two," hissed the Snake-Killer. It is not easy to hiss a sentence without a single "s" in it, and the fact that he succeeded in doing so shows to what a pitch of emotion the man had been goaded by Ferdinand's maddening air of superiority.

"Yes, but what can we do?" queried an octogenarian, when this last remark had been passed on to him down his ear-trumpet.

"That's the trouble," sighed the Scooper. "What can we do?" And there was a sorrowful shaking of heads.

"I know!" exclaimed the Cat-Stroker, who had not hitherto spoken. He was a lawyer, and a man of subtle and sinister mind. "I have it! There's a boy in my office—young Parsloe—who could beat this man Dibble hollow. I'll wire him to come down here and we'll spring him on this fellow and knock some of the conceit out of him."

There was a chorus of approval.

"But are you sure he can beat him?" asked the Snake-Killer, anxiously. "It would never do to make a mistake."

"Of course I'm sure," said the Cat-Stroker. "George Parsloe once went round in ninety-four."

"Many changes there have been since ninety-four," said the octogenarian, nodding sagely. "Ah, many, many changes. None of these motor-cars then, tearing about and killing——"

Kindly hands led him off to have an egg-and-milk, and the remaining conspirators returned to the point at issue with bent brows.

"Ninety-four?" said the Scooper, incredulously. "Do you mean counting every stroke?"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Counting every stroke."

"Not conceding himself any putts?"

"Not one."

"Wire him to come at once," said the meeting with one voice.

That night the Cat-Stroker approached Ferdinand, smooth, subtle, lawyer-like.

"Oh, Dibble," he said, "just the man I wanted to see. Dibble, there's a young friend of mine coming down here who goes in for golf a little. George Parsloe is his name. I was wondering if you could spare time to give him a game. He is just a novice, you know."

"I shall be delighted to play a round with him," said Ferdinand kindly.

"He might pick up a pointer or two from watching you," said the Cat-Stroker.

"True, true," said Ferdinand.

"Then I'll introduce you when he shows up."

"Delighted," said Ferdinand.

He was in excellent humour that night, for he had had a letter from Barbara saying that she was arriving on the next day but one.

It was Ferdinand's healthy custom of a morning to get up in good time and take a dip in the sea before breakfast. On the morning of the day of Barbara's arrival, he arose, as usual, donned his flannels, took a good look at the cup, and started out. It was a fine, fresh morning, and he glowed both externally and internally. As he crossed the links, for the nearest route to the water was through the fairway of the seventh, he was whistling happily and rehearsing in his mind the opening sentences of his proposal. For it was his firm resolve that night after dinner to ask Barbara to marry him. He was proceeding over the smooth turf without a care in the world, when there was a sudden cry of "Fore!" and the next moment a golf-ball, missing him by inches, sailed up the fairway and came to a rest fifty yards from where he stood. He looked round and observed a figure coming towards him from the tee.

The distance from the tee was fully a hundred and thirty yards. Add fifty to that, and you have a hundred and eighty yards. No such drive had been made on the Marvis Bay links since their foundation, and such is the generous spirit of the true golfer that Ferdinand's first emotion, after the not inexcusable spasm

THE HEART OF A GOOF

of panic caused by the hum of the ball past his ear, was one of cordial admiration. By some kindly miracle, he supposed, one of his hotel acquaintances had been permitted for once in his life to time a drive right. It was only when the other man came up that there began to steal over him a sickening apprehension. The faces of all those who hewed divots on the hotel course were familiar to him, and the fact that this fellow was a stranger seemed to point with dreadful certainty to his being the man he had agreed to play.

"Sorry," said the man. He was a tall, strikingly handsome youth, with brown eyes and a dark moustache.

"Oh, that's all right," said Ferdinand. "Er—do you always drive like that?"

"Well, I generally get a bit longer ball, but I'm off my drive this morning. It's lucky I came out and got this practice. I'm playing a match tomorrow with a fellow named Dibble, who's a local champion, or something."

"Me," said Ferdinand, humbly.

"Eh? Oh, you?" Mr. Parsloe eyed him appraisingly. "Well, may the best man win."

As this was precisely what Ferdinand was afraid was going to happen, he nodded in a sickly manner and tottered off to his bathe. The magic had gone out of the morning. The sun still shone, but in a silly, feeble way; and a cold and depressing wind had sprung up. For Ferdinand's inferiority complex, which had seemed cured for ever, was back again, doing business at the old stand.

How sad it is in this life that the moment to which we have looked forward with the most glowing anticipation so often turns out on arrival, flat, cold, and disappointing. For ten days Barbara Medway had been living for that meeting with Ferdinand, when, getting out of the train, she would see him popping about on the horizon with the lovelight sparkling in his eyes and words of devotion trembling on his lips. The poor girl never doubted for an instant that he would unleash his pent-up emotions inside the first five minutes, and her only worry was lest he should give an embarrassing publicity to the sacred scene by falling on his knees on the station platform.

"Well, here I am at last," she cried gaily.

"Hullo!" said Ferdinand, with a twisted smile.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

The girl looked at him, chilled. How could she know that his peculiar manner was due entirely to the severe attack of cold feet resultant upon his meeting with George Parsloe that morning? The interpretation which she placed upon it was that he was not glad to see her. If he had behaved like this before, she would, of course, have put it down to ingrowing goofery, but now she had his written statements to prove that for the last ten days his golf had been one long series of triumphs.

"I got your letters," she said, persevering bravely.

"I thought you would," said Ferdinand, absently.

"You seem to have been doing wonders."

"Yes."

There was a silence.

"Have a nice journey?" said Ferdinand.

"Very," said Barbara.

She spoke coldly, for she was madder than a wet hen. She saw it all now. In the ten days since they had parted, his love, she realized, had waned. Some other girl, met in the romantic surroundings of this picturesque resort, had supplanted her in his affections. She knew how quickly Cupid gets off the mark at a summer hotel, and for an instant she blamed herself for ever having been so ivory-skulled as to let him come to this place alone. Then regret was swallowed up in wrath, and she became so glacial that Ferdinand, who had been on the point of telling her the secret of his gloom, retired into his shell and conversation during the drive to the hotel never soared above a certain level. Ferdinand said the sunshine was nice and Barbara said yes, it was nice, and Ferdinand said it looked pretty on the water, and Barbara said yes, it did look pretty on the water, and Ferdinand said he hoped it was not going to rain, and Barbara said yes, it would be a pity if it rained. And then there was another lengthy silence.

"How is my uncle?" asked Barbara at last.

I omitted to mention that the individual to whom I have referred as the Cat-Stroker was Barbara's mother's brother, and her host at Marvis Bay.

"Your uncle?"

"His name is Tuttle. Have you met him?"

"Oh yes. I've seen a good deal of him. He has got a friend staying with him," said Ferdinand, his mind returning to the matter nearest his heart. "A fellow named Parsloe."

"Oh, is George Parsloe here? How jolly!"

"Do you know him?" barked Ferdinand, hollowly. He would not have supposed that anything could have added to his existing depression, but he was conscious now of having slipped a few rungs farther down the ladder of gloom. There had been a horribly joyful ring in her voice. Ah, well, he reflected morosely, how like life it all was! We never know what the morrow may bring forth. We strike a good patch and are beginning to think pretty well of ourselves, and along comes a George Parsloe.

"Of course I do," said Barbara. "Why, there he is."

The cab had drawn up at the door of the hotel, and on the porch George Parsloe was airing his graceful person. To Ferdinand's fevered eye he looked like a Greek god, and his inferiority complex began to exhibit symptoms of elephantiasis. How could he compete at love or golf with a fellow who looked as if he had stepped out of the movies and considered himself off his drive when he did a hundred and eighty yards?

"Geor-gee!" cried Barbara, blithely. "Hullo, George!"

"Why, hullo, Barbara!"

They fell into pleasant conversation, while Ferdinand hung miserably about in the offing. And presently, feeling that his society was not essential to their happiness, he slunk away.

George Parsloe dined at the Cat-Stroker's table that night, and it was with George Parsloe that Barbara roamed in the moonlight after dinner. Ferdinand, after a profitless hour at the billiard-table, went early to his room. But not even the rays of the moon, glinting on his cup, could soothe the fever in his soul. He practised putting sombrely into his tooth-glass for a while; then, going to bed, fell at last into a troubled sleep.

Barbara slept late the next morning and breakfasted in her room. Coming down towards noon, she found a strange emptiness in the hotel. It was her experience of summer hotels that a really fine day like this one was the cue for half the inhabitants to collect in the lounge, shut all the windows, and talk about conditions in the jute industry. To her surprise, though the sun was streaming down from a cloudless sky, the only occupant of the lounge was the octogenarian with the ear-trumpet. She observed that he was chuckling to himself in a senile manner.

"Good morning," she said, politely, for she had made his acquaintance on the previous evening.

"Hey?" said the octogenarian, suspending his chuckling and getting his trumpet into position.

"I said 'Good morning!'" roared Barbara into the receiver.

"Hey?"

"Good morning!"

"Ah! Yes, it's a very fine morning, a very fine morning. If it wasn't for missing my bun and glass of milk at twelve sharp," said the octogenarian, "I'd be down on the links. That's where I'd be, down on the links. If it wasn't for missing my bun and glass of milk."

This refreshment arriving at this moment, he dismantled the radio outfit and began to restore his tissues.

"Watching the match," he explained, pausing for a moment in his bun-mangling.

"What match?"

The octogenarian sipped his milk.

"What match?" repeated Barbara.

"Hey?"

"What match?"

The octogenarian began to chuckle again and nearly swallowed a crumb the wrong way.

"Take some of the conceit out of him," he gurgled.

"Out of who?" asked Barbara, knowing perfectly well that she should have said "whom".

"Yes," said the octogenarian.

"Who is conceited?"

"Ah! This young fellow, Dibble. Very conceited. I saw it in his eye from the first, but nobody would listen to me. Mark my words, I said, that boy needs taking down a peg or two. Well, he's going to be this morning. Your uncle wired to young Parsloe to come down, and he's arranged a match between them. Dibble——" Here the octogenarian choked again and had to rinse himself out with milk, "Dibble doesn't know that Parsloe once went round in ninety-four!"

"What?"

Everything seemed to go black to Barbara. Through a murky mist she appeared to be looking at a negro octogenarian, sipping ink. Then her eyes cleared, and she found herself clutching for support at the back of a chair. She understood

now. She realized why Ferdinand had been so distraught, and her whole heart went out to him in a spasm of maternal pity. How she had wronged him!

"Take some of the conceit out of him," the octogenarian was mumbling, and Barbara felt a sudden sharp loathing for the old man. For two pins she could have dropped a beetle in his milk. Then the need for action roused her. What action? She did not know. All she knew was that she must act.

"Oh!" she cried.

"Hey?" said the octogenarian, bringing his trumpet to the ready.

But Barbara had gone.

It was not far to the links, and Barbara covered the distance on flying feet. She reached the club-house, but the course was empty except for the Scooper, who was preparing to drive off the first tee. In spite of the fact that something seemed to tell her subconsciously that this was one of the sights she ought not to miss, the girl did not wait to watch. Assuming that the match had started soon after breakfast, it must by now have reached one of the holes on the second nine. She ran down the hill, looking to left and right, and was presently aware of a group of spectators clustered about a green in the distance. As she hurried towards them they moved away, and now she could see Ferdinand advancing to the next tee. With a thrill that shook her whole body she realized that he had the honour. So he must have won one hole, at any rate. Then she saw her uncle.

"How are they?" she gasped.

Mr. Tuttle seemed moody. It was apparent that things were not going altogether to his liking.

"All square at the fifteenth," he replied, gloomily.

"All square!"

"Yes. Young Parsloe," said Mr. Tuttle with a sour look in the direction of that lissom athlete, "doesn't seem to be able to do a thing right on the greens. He has been putting like a sheep with the botts."

From the foregoing remark of Mr. Tuttle you will, no doubt, have gleaned at least a clue to the mystery of how Ferdinand Dibble had managed to hold his long-driving adversary up to the fifteenth green, but for all that you will probably consider that some further explanation of this amazing state of affairs is required. Mere bad putting on the part of George Parsloe is

THE HEART OF A GOOF

not, you feel, sufficient to cover the matter entirely. You are right. There was another very important factor in the situation—to wit, that by some extraordinary chance Ferdinand Dibble had started right off from the first tee, playing the game of a lifetime. Never had he made such drives, never chipped his chips so shrewdly.

About Ferdinand's driving there was as a general thing a fatal stiffness and over-caution which prevented success. And with his chip-shots he rarely achieved accuracy owing to his habit of rearing his head like the lion of the jungle just before the club struck the ball. But today he had been swinging with a careless freedom, and his chips had been true and clean. The thing had puzzled him all the way round. It had not elated him, for, owing to Barbara's aloofness and the way in which she had gambolled about George Parsloe, like a young lamb in the springtime, he was in too deep a state of dejection to be elated by anything. And now, suddenly, in a flash of clear vision, he perceived the reason why he had been playing so well today. It was just because he was not elated. It was simply because he was so profoundly miserable.

That was what Ferdinand told himself as he stepped off the sixteenth, after hitting a screamer down the centre of the fairway, and I am convinced that he was right. Like so many indifferent golfers, Ferdinand Dibble had always made the game hard for himself by thinking too much. He was a deep student of the works of the masters, and whenever he prepared to play a stroke he had a complete mental list of all the mistakes which it was possible to make. He would remember how Taylor had warned against dipping the right shoulder, how Vardon had inveighed against any movement of the head; he would recall how Ray had mentioned the tendency to snatch back the club, how Braid had spoken sadly of those who sin against their better selves by stiffening the muscles and heaving.

The consequence was that when, after waggling in a frozen manner till mere shame urged him to take some definite course of action, he eventually swung, he invariably proceeded to dip his right shoulder, stiffen his muscles, heave, and snatch back the club, at the same time raising his head sharply as in the illustrated plate ("Some Frequent Faults of Beginners—No. 3—Lifting the Bean") facing page thirty-four of James Braid's *Golf Without Tears*. Today, he had been so preoccupied with

his broken heart that he had made his shots absently, almost carelessly, with the result that at least one in every three had been a lallapaloosa.

Meanwhile, George Parsloe had driven off and the match was progressing. George was feeling a little flustered by now. He had been given to understand that this bird Dibble was a hundred-at-his-best man, and all the way round the fellow had been reeling off fives in great profusion, and had once actually got a four. True, there had been an occasional six, and even a seven, but that did not alter the main fact that the man was making the dickens of a game of it. With the haughty spirit of one who had once done a ninety-four, George Parsloe had anticipated being at least three up at the turn. Instead of which he had been two down, and had had to fight strenuously to draw level.

Nevertheless, he drove steadily and well, and would certainly have won the hole had it not been for his weak and sinful putting. The same defect caused him to halve the seventeenth, after being on in two, with Ferdinand wandering in the desert and only reaching the green with his fourth. Then, however, Ferdinand holed out from a distance of seven yards, getting a five; which George's three putts just enabled him to equal.

Barbara had watched the proceedings with a beating heart. At first she had looked on from afar; but now, drawn as by a magnet, she approached the tee. Ferdinand was driving off. She held her breath. Ferdinand held his breath. And all around one could see their respective breaths being held by George Parsloe, Mr. Tuttle, and the enthralled crowd of spectators. It was a moment of the acutest tension, and it was broken by the crack of Ferdinand's driver as it met the ball and sent it hopping along the ground for a mere thirty yards. At this supreme crisis in the match Ferdinand Dibble had topped.

George Parsloe teed up his ball. There was a smile of quiet satisfaction on his face. He snuggled the driver in his hands, and gave it a preliminary swish. This, felt George Parsloe, was where the happy ending came. He could drive as he had never driven before. He would so drive that it would take his opponent at least three shots to catch up with him. He drew back his club with infinite caution, poised it at the top of the swing——

"I always wonder——" said a clear, girlish voice, ripping the silence like the explosion of a bomb.

George Parsloe started. His club wobbled. It descended. The ball trickled into the long grass in front of the tee. There was a grim pause.

"You were saying, Miss Medway——" said George Parsloe, in a small, flat voice.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Barbara. "I'm afraid I put you off."

"A little, perhaps. Possibly the merest trifle. But you were saying you wondered about something. Can I be of any assistance?"

"I was only saying," said Barbara, "that I always wonder why tees are called tees."

George Parsloe swallowed once or twice. He also blinked a little feverishly. His eyes had a dazed, staring expression.

"I am afraid I cannot tell you off-hand," he said, "but I will make a point of consulting some good encyclopædia at the earliest opportunity."

"Thank you so much."

"Not at all. It will be a pleasure. In case you were thinking of inquiring at the moment when I am putting why greens are called greens, may I venture the suggestion now that it is because they are green?"

And, so saying, George Parsloe stalked to his ball and found it nestling in the heart of some shrub of which, not being a botanist, I cannot give you the name. It was a close-knit, adhesive shrub, and it twined its tentacles so lovingly around George Parsloe's niblick that he missed his first shot altogether. His second made the ball rock, and his third dislodged it. Playing a full swing with his brassie and being by now a mere cauldron of seething emotions he missed his fourth. His fifth came to within a few inches of Ferdinand's drive, and he picked it up and hurled it from him into the rough as if it had been something venomous.

"Your hole and match," said George Parsloe, thinly.

Ferdinand Dibble sat beside the glittering ocean. He had hurried off the course with swift strides the moment George Parsloe had spoken those bitter words. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts.

They were mixed thoughts. For a moment joy at the reflection that he had won a tough match came irresistibly to the surface, only to sink again as he remembered that life, whatever its

triumphs, could hold nothing for him now that Barbara Medway loved another.

"Mr. Dibble!"

He looked up. She was standing at his side. He gulped and rose to his feet.

"Yes?"

There was a silence.

"Doesn't the sun look pretty on the water?" said Barbara.

Ferdinand groaned. This was too much.

"Leave me," he said, hollowly. "Go back to your Parsloe, the man with whom you walked in the moonlight beside this same water."

"Well, why shouldn't I walk with Mr. Parsloe in the moonlight beside this same water?" demanded Barbara, with spirit.

"I never said," replied Ferdinand, for he was a fair man at heart, "that you shouldn't walk with Mr. Parsloe beside this same water. I simply said you did walk with Mr. Parsloe beside this same water."

"I've a perfect right to walk with Mr. Parsloe beside this same water," persisted Barbara. "He and I are old friends."

Ferdinand groaned again.

"Exactly! There you are! As I suspected. Old friends. Played together as children, and what not, I shouldn't wonder."

"No, we didn't. I've only known him five years. But he is engaged to be married to my greatest chum, so that draws us together."

Ferdinand uttered a strangled cry.

"Parsloe engaged to be married!"

"Yes. The wedding takes place next month."

"But look here." Ferdinand's forehead was wrinkled. He was thinking tensely. "Look here," said Ferdinand, a close reasoner. "If Parsloe's engaged to your greatest chum, he can't be in love with *you*."

"No."

"And you aren't in love with him?"

"No."

"Then, by gad," said Ferdinand, "how about it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you marry me?" bellowed Ferdinand.

"Yes."

"You will?"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Of course I will."

"Darling!" cried Ferdinand.

"There is only one thing that bothers me a bit," said Ferdinand, thoughtfully, as they strolled together over the scented meadows, while in the trees above them a thousand birds trilled Mendelssohn's Wedding March.

"What is that?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Ferdinand. "The fact is, I've just discovered the great secret of golf. You can't play a really hot game unless you're so miserable that you don't worry over your shots. Take the case of a chip-shot, for instance. If you're really wretched, you don't care where the ball is going and so you don't raise your head to see. Grief automatically prevents pressing and over-swinging. Look at the top-notchers. Have you ever seen a happy pro.?"

"No. I don't think I have."

"Well, then!"

"But pros. are all Scotchmen," argued Barbara.

"It doesn't matter. I'm sure I'm right. And the darned thing is that I'm going to be so infernally happy all the rest of my life that I suppose my handicap will go up to thirty or something."

Barbara squeezed his hand lovingly.

"Don't worry, precious," she said, soothingly. "It will be all right. I am a woman, and, once we are married, I shall be able to think of at least a hundred ways of snootering you to such an extent that you'll be fit to win the Amateur Championship."

"You will?" said Ferdinand, anxiously. "You're sure?"

"Quite, quite sure, dearest," said Barbara.

"My angel!" said Ferdinand.

He folded her in his arms, using the interlocking grip.

CHAPTER II

HIGH STAKES

THE summer day was drawing to a close. Over the terrace outside the club-house the chestnut trees threw long shadows, and such bees as still lingered in the flower-beds had the air of tired business men who are about ready to shut up the office and go off to dinner and a musical comedy. The Oldest Member, stirring in his favourite chair, glanced at his watch and yawned.

As he did so, from the neighbourhood of the eighteenth green, hidden from his view by the slope of the ground, there came suddenly a medley of shrill animal cries, and he deduced that some belated match must just have reached a finish. His surmise was correct. The babble of voices drew nearer, and over the brow of the hill came a little group of men. Two, who appeared to be the ringleaders in the affair were short and stout. One was cheerful and the other dejected. The rest of the company consisted of friends and adherents; and one of these, a young man who seemed to be amused, strolled to where the Oldest Member sat.

"What," inquired the Sage, "was all the shouting for?"

The young man sank into a chair and lighted a cigarette.

"Perkins and Broster," he said, "were all square at the seventeenth, and they raised the stakes to fifty pounds. They were both on the green in seven, and Perkins had a two-foot putt to halve the match. He missed it by six inches. They play pretty high, those two."

"It is a curious thing," said the Oldest Member, "that men whose golf is of a kind that makes hardened caddies wince always do. The more competent a player, the smaller the stake that contents him. It is only when you get down into the submerged tenth of the golfing world that you find the big gambling. However, I would not call fifty pounds anything sensational in the case of two men like Perkins and Broster. They are both well

THE HEART OF A GOOF

provided with the world's goods. If you would care to hear the story——"

The young man's jaw fell a couple of notches.

"I had no idea it was so late," he bleated. "I ought to be——"

"——of a man who played for really high stakes——"

"I promised to——"

"——I will tell it to you," said the Sage.

"Look here," said the young man, sullenly, "it isn't one of those stories about two men who fall in love with the same girl and play a match to decide which is to marry her, is it? Because if so——"

"The stake to which I allude," said the Oldest Member, "was something far higher and bigger than a woman's love. Shall I proceed?"

"All right," said the young man, resignedly. "Snap into it."

It has been well said—I think by the man who wrote the subtitles for "Cage-Birds of Society" (began the Oldest Member)—that wealth does not always bring happiness. It was so with Bradbury Fisher, the hero of the story which I am about to relate. One of America's most prominent tainted millionaires, he had two sorrows in life—his handicap refused to stir from twenty-four and his wife disapproved of his collection of famous golf relics. Once, finding him crooning over the trousers in which Ouimet had won his historic replay against Vardon and Ray in the American Open, she had asked him why he did not collect something worth while, like Old Masters or first editions.

Worth while! Bradbury had forgiven, for he loved the woman, but he could not forget.

For Bradbury Fisher, like so many men who have taken to the game in middle age, after a youth misspent in the pursuits of commerce, was no half-hearted enthusiast. Although he still occasionally descended on Wall Street in order to pry the small investor loose from another couple of million, what he really lived for now was golf and his collection. He had begun the collection in his first year as a golfer, and he prized it dearly. And when he reflected that his wife had stopped him purchasing J. H. Taylor's shirt-stud, which he could have had for a few hundred pounds, the iron seemed to enter into his soul.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

The distressing episode had occurred in London, and he was now on his way back to New York, having left his wife to continue her holiday in England. All through the voyage he remained moody and distraught; and at the ship's concert, at which he was forced to take the chair, he was heard to observe to the purser that if the alleged soprano who had just sung "My Little Grey Home in the West" had the immortal gall to take a second encore he hoped that she would trip over a high note and dislocate her neck.

Such was Bradbury Fisher's mood throughout the ocean journey, and it remained constant until he arrived at his palatial home at Goldenville, Long Island, where, as he sat smoking a moody after-dinner cigar in the Versailles drawing-room, Blizzard, his English butler, informed him that Mr. Gladstone Bott desired to speak to him on the telephone.

"Tell him to go and boil himself," said Bradbury.

"Very good, sir."

"No, I'll tell him myself," said Bradbury. He strode to the telephone. "Hullo!" he said, curtly.

He was not fond of this Bott. There are certain men who seem fated to go through life as rivals. It was so with Bradbury Fisher and J. Gladstone Bott. Born in the same town within a few days of one another, they had come to New York in the same week, and from that moment their careers had run side by side. Fisher had made his first million two days before Bott, but Bott's first divorce had got half a column and two sticks more publicity than Fisher's.

At Sing-Sing, where each had spent several happy years of early manhood, they had run neck and neck for the prizes which that institution has to offer. Fisher secured the position of catcher on the baseball nine in preference to Bott, but Bott just nosed Fisher out when it came to the choice of a tenor for the glee club. Bott was selected for the debating contest against Auburn, but Fisher got the last place on the crossword puzzle team, with Bott merely first reserve.

They had taken up golf simultaneously, and their handicaps had remained level ever since. Between such men it is not surprising that there was little love lost.

"Hullo!" said Gladstone Bott. "So you're back? Say, listen, Fisher. I think I've got something that'll interest you. Something you'll be glad to have in your golf collection."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Bradbury Fisher's mood softened. He disliked Bott, but that was no reason for not doing business with him. And though he had little faith in the man's judgment it might be that he had stumbled upon some valuable antique. There crossed his mind the comforting thought that his wife was three thousand miles away and that he was no longer under her penetrating eye—that eye which, so to speak, was always “about his bath and about his bed and spying out all his ways”.

“I’ve just returned from a trip down South,” proceeded Bott, “and I have secured the authentic baffy used by Bobby Jones in his first important contest—the Infants’ All-In Championship of Atlanta, Georgia, open to those of both sexes not yet having finished teething.”

Bradbury gasped. He had heard rumours that this treasure was in existence, but he had never credited them.

“You’re sure?” he cried. “You’re positive it’s genuine?”

“I have a written guarantee from Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones, and the nurse.”

“How much, Bott, old man?” stammered Bradbury. “How much do you want for it, Gladstone, old top? I’ll give you a hundred thousand dollars.”

“Ha!”

“Five hundred thousand.”

“Ha, ha!”

“A million.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Two million.”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha!”

Bradbury Fisher's strong face twisted like that of a tortured fiend. He registered in quick succession rage, despair, hate, fury, anguish, pique, and resentment. But when he spoke again his voice was soft and gentle.

“Gladdy, old socks,” he said, “we have been friends for years.”

“No, we haven’t,” said Gladstone Bott.

“Yes, we have.”

“No, we haven’t.”

“Well, anyway, what about two million five hundred?”

“Nothing doing. Say, listen. Do you really want that baffy?”

“I do, Botty, old egg, I do indeed.”

“Then listen. I’ll exchange it for Blizzard.”

"For Blizzard?" quavered Fisher.

"For Blizzard."

It occurs to me that, when describing the closeness of the rivalry between these two men, I may have conveyed the impression that in no department of life could either claim a definite advantage over the other. If that is so, I erred. It is true that in a general way, whatever one had, the other had something equally good to counterbalance it; but in just one matter Bradbury Fisher had triumphed completely over Gladstone Bott. Bradbury Fisher had the finest English butler on Long Island.

Blizzard stood alone. There is a regrettable tendency on the part of English butlers today to deviate more and more from the type which made their species famous. The modern butler has a nasty knack of being a lissom young man in perfect condition who looks like the son of the house. But Blizzard was of the fine old school. Before coming to the Fisher home he had been for fifteen years in the service of an earl, and his appearance suggested that throughout those fifteen years he had not let a day pass without its pint of port. He radiated port and popeyed dignity. He had splay feet and three chins, and when he walked his curving waistcoat preceded him like the advance guard of some royal procession.

From the first, Bradbury had been perfectly aware that Bott coveted Blizzard, and the knowledge had sweetened his life. But this was the first time he had come out into the open and admitted it.

"Blizzard?" whispered Fisher.

"Blizzard," said Bott firmly. "It's my wife's birthday next week, and I've been wondering what to give her."

Bradbury Fisher shuddered from head to foot, and his legs wobbled like asparagus stalks. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. The serpent was tempting him—tempting him grievously.

"You're sure you won't take three million—or four—or something like that?"

"No; I want Blizzard."

Bradbury Fisher passed his handkerchief over his streaming brow.

"So be it," he said in a low voice.

The Jones baffy arrived that night, and for some hours Bradbury Fisher gloated over it with the unmixed joy of a collector

THE HEART OF A GOOF

who has secured the prize of a lifetime. Then, stealing gradually over him, came the realization of what he had done.

He was thinking of his wife and what she would say when she heard of this. Blizzard was Mrs. Fisher's pride and joy. She had never, like the poet, nursed a dear gazelle, but, had she done so, her attitude towards it would have been identical with her attitude towards Blizzard. Although so far away, it was plain that her thoughts still lingered with the pleasure she had left at home, for on his arrival Bradbury had found three cables awaiting him.

The first ran:

"How is Blizzard? Reply."

The second:

"How is Blizzard's sciatica? Reply."

The third:

"Blizzard's hiccups. How are they? Suggest Doctor Murphy's Tonic Swamp-Juice. Highly spoken of. Three times a day after meals. Try for week and cable result."

It did not require a clairvoyant to tell Bradbury that, if on her return she found that he had disposed of Blizzard in exchange for a child's cut-down bafly, she would certainly sue him for divorce. And there was not a jury in America that would not give their verdict in her favour without a dissentient voice. His first wife, he recalled, had divorced him on far flimsier grounds. So had his second, third, and fourth. And Bradbury loved his wife. There had been a time in his life when, if he lost a wife, he had felt philosophically that there would be another along in a minute; but, as a man grows older, he tends to become set in his habits, and he could not contemplate existence without the company of the present incumbent.

What, therefore, to do? What, when you came right down to it, to do?

There seemed no way out of the dilemma. If he kept the Jones bafly, no other price would satisfy Bott's jealous greed. And to part with the bafly, now that it was actually in his possession, was unthinkable.

And then, in the small hours of the morning, as he tossed sleeplessly on his Louis Quinze bed, his giant brain conceived a plan.

On the following afternoon he made his way to the club-house, and was informed that Bott was out playing a round with another millionaire of his acquaintance. Bradbury waited, and presently his rival appeared.

"Hey!" said Gladstone Bott, in his abrupt uncouth way. "When are you going to deliver that butler?"

"I will make the shipment at the earliest date," said Bradbury.

"I was expecting him last night."

"You shall have him shortly."

"What do you feed him on?" asked Gladstone Bott.

"Oh, anything you have yourselves. Put sulphur in his port in the hot weather. Tell me, how did your match go?"

"He beat me. I had rotten luck."

Bradbury Fisher's eyes gleamed. His moment had come.

"Luck?" he said. "What do you mean, luck? Luck has nothing to do with it. You're always beefing about your luck. The trouble with you is that you play rottenly."

"What!"

"It is not use trying to play golf unless you learn the first principles and do it properly. Look at the way you drive."

"What's wrong with my driving?"

"Nothing, except that you don't do anything right. In driving, as the club comes back in the swing, the weight should be shifted by degrees, quietly and gradually, until, when the club has reached its topmost point, the whole weight of the body is supported by the right leg, the left foot being turned at the time and the left knee bent in towards the right leg. But, regardless of how much you perfect your style, you cannot develop any method which will not require you to keep your head still so that you can see your ball clearly."

"Hey!"

"It is obvious that it is impossible to introduce a jerk or a sudden violent effort into any part of the swing without disturbing the balance or moving the head. I want to drive home the fact that it is absolutely essential to——"

"Hey!" cried Gladstone Bott.

The man was shaken to the core. From the local pro., and from scratch men of his acquaintance, he would gladly have listened to this sort of thing by the hour, but to hear these words from Bradbury Fisher, whose handicap was the same as his own, and out of whom it was his unperishable conviction that he could

THE HEART OF A GOOF

hammer the tar any time he got him out on the links, was too much.

"Where do you get off," he demanded, heatedly, "trying to teach me golf?"

Bradbury Fisher chuckled to himself. Everything was working out as his subtle mind had foreseen.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I was only speaking for your good."

"I like your nerve! I can lick you any time we start."

"It's easy enough to talk."

"I trimmed you twice the week before you sailed to England."

"Naturally," said Bradbury Fisher, "in a friendly round, with only a few thousand dollars on the match, a man does not extend himself. You wouldn't dare to play me for anything that really mattered."

"I'll play you when you like for anything you like."

"Very well. I'll play you for Blizzard."

"Against what?"

"Oh, anything you please. How about a couple of railroads?"

"Make it three."

"Very well."

"Next Friday suit you?"

"Sure," said Bradbury Fisher.

It seemed to him that his troubles were over. Like all twenty-four handicap men, he had the most perfect confidence in his ability to beat all other twenty-four handicap men. As for Gladstone Bott, he knew that he could disembowel him any time he was able to lure him out of the club-house.

Nevertheless, as he breakfasted on the morning of the fateful match, Bradbury Fisher was conscious of an unwonted nervousness. He was no weakling. In Wall Street his phlegm in moments of stress was a byword. On the famous occasion when the B. and G. crowd had attacked C. and D., and in order to keep control of L. and M. he had been compelled to buy so largely of S. and T., he had not turned a hair. And yet this morning, in endeavouring to prong up segments of bacon, he twice missed the plate altogether and on a third occasion speared himself in the cheek with his fork. The spectacle of Blizzard, so calm, so competent, so supremely the perfect butler, unnerved him.

"I am jumpy today, Blizzard," he said, forcing a laugh.

"Yes, sir. You do, indeed, appear to have the willies."

"Yes. I am playing a very important golf-match this morning."

"Indeed, sir?"

"I must pull myself together, Blizzard."

"Yes, sir. And, if I may respectfully make the suggestion, you should endeavour, when in action, to keep the head down and the eye rigidly upon the ball."

"I will, Blizzard, I will," said Bradbury Fisher, his keen eyes clouding under a sudden mist of tears. "Thank you, Blizzard, for the advice."

"Not at all, sir."

"How is your sciatica, Blizzard?"

"A trifle improved, I thank you, sir."

"And your hiccups?"

"I am conscious of a slight though possibly only a temporary relief, sir."

"Good," said Bradbury Fisher.

He left the room with a firm step and, proceeding to his library, read for a while portions of that grand chapter in James Braid's *Advanced Golf* which deals with driving into the wind. It was a fair and cloudless morning, but it was as well to be prepared for emergencies. Then, feeling that he had done all that could be done, he ordered the car and was taken to the links.

Gladstone Bott was awaiting him on the first tee, in company with two caddies. A curt greeting, a spin of the coin, and Gladstone Bott, securing the honour, stepped out to begin the contest.

Although there are, of course, endless sub-species in their ranks, not all of which have yet been classified by science, twenty-four-handicap golfers may be stated broadly to fall into two classes, the dashing and the cautious—those, that is to say, who endeavour to do every hole in a brilliant one and those who are content to win with a steady nine. Gladstone Bott was one of the cautious brigade. He fussed about for a few moments like a hen scratching gravel, then with a stiff quarter-swing sent his ball straight down the fairway for a matter of seventy yards, and it was Bradbury Fisher's turn to drive.

Now, normally, Bradbury Fisher was essentially a dasher. It was his habit, as a rule, to raise his left foot some six inches from

THE HEART OF A GOOF

the ground and, having swayed forcefully back on to his right leg, to sway sharply forward again and lash out with sickening violence in the general direction of the ball. It was a method which at times produced excellent results, though it had the flaw that it was somewhat uncertain. Bradbury Fisher was the only member of the club, with the exception of the club champion, who had ever carried the second green with his drive; but, on the other hand, he was also the only member who had ever laid his drive on the eleventh dead to the pin of the sixteenth.

But today the magnitude of the issues at stake had wrought a change in him. Planted firmly on both feet, he fiddled at the ball in the manner of one playing spillikens. When he swung, it was with a swing resembling that of Gladstone Bott; and, like Bott, he achieved a nice, steady, rainbow-shaped drive of some seventy yards straight down the middle. Bott replied with an eighty-yard brassie shot. Bradbury held him with another. And so, working their way cautiously across the prairie, they came to the green, where Bradbury, laying his third putt dead, halved the hole.

The second was a repetition of the first, the third and fourth repetitions of the second. But on the fifth green the fortunes of the match began to change. Here Gladstone Bott, faced with a fifteen-foot putt to win, smote his ball firmly off the line, as had been his practice at each of the preceding holes, and the ball, hitting a worm-cast and bounding off to the left, ran on a couple of yards, hit another worm-cast, bounded to the right, and finally, bumping into a twig, leaped to the left again and clattered into the tin.

"One up," said Gladstone Bott. "Tricky, some of these greens are. You have to gauge the angles to a nicety."

At the sixth a donkey in an adjoining field uttered a raucous bray just as Bott was addressing his ball with a mashie-niblick on the edge of the green. He started violently and, jerking his club with a spasmodic reflex action of the forearm, holed out.

"Nice work," said Gladstone Bott.

The seventh was a short hole, guarded by two large bunkers between which ran a narrow footpath of turf. Gladstone Bott's mashie-shot, falling short, ran over the rough, peered for a moment into the depths to the left, then, winding up the path, trickled on to the green, struck a fortunate slope, acquired momentum, ran on, and dropped into the hole.

"Nearly missed it," said Gladstone Bott, drawing a deep breath.

Bradbury Fisher looked out upon a world that swam and danced before his eyes. He had not been prepared for this sort of thing. The way things were shaping, he felt that it would hardly surprise him now if the cups were to start jumping up and snapping at Bott's ball like starving dogs.

"Three up," said Gladstone Bott.

With a strong effort Bradbury Fisher mastered his feelings. His mouth set grimly. Matters, he perceived, had reached a crisis. He saw now that he had made a mistake in allowing himself to be intimidated by the importance of the occasion into being scientific. Nature had never intended him for a scientific golfer, and up till now he had been behaving like an animated illustration out of a book by Vardon. He had taken his club back along and near the turf, allowing it to trend around the legs as far as was permitted by the movement of the arms. He had kept his right elbow close to the side, this action coming into operation before the club was allowed to describe a section of a circle in an upward direction, whence it was carried by means of a slow, steady, swinging movement. He had pivoted, he had pronated the wrists, and he had been careful about the lateral hip-shift.

And it had been all wrong. That sort of stuff might suit some people, but not him. He was a biffer, a swatter, and a slosher; and it flashed upon him now that only by biffing, swatting, and sloshing as he had never biffed, swatted, and sloshed before could he hope to recover the ground he had lost.

Gladstone Bott was not one of those players who grow careless with success. His drive at the eighth was just as steady and short as ever. But this time Bradbury Fisher made no attempt to imitate him. For seven holes he had been checking his natural instincts, and now he drove with all the banked-up fury that comes with release from long suppression.

For an instant he remained poised on one leg like a stork; then there was a whistle and a crack, and the ball, smitten squarely in the midriff, flew down the course and, soaring over the bunkers, hit the turf and gambolled to within twenty yards of the green.

He straightened out the kinks in his spine with a grim smile. Allowing himself the regulation three putts, he would be down

THE HEART OF A GOOF

in five, and only a miracle could give Gladstone Bott anything better than a seven.

"Two down," he said some minutes later, and Gladstone Bott nodded sullenly.

It was not often that Bradbury Fisher kept on the fairway with two consecutive drives, but strange things were happening today. Not only was his drive at the ninth a full two hundred and forty yards, but it was also perfectly straight.

"One down," said Bradbury Fisher, and Bott nodded even more sullenly than before.

There are few things more demoralizing than to be consistently outdriven; and when he is outdriven by a hundred and seventy yards at two consecutive holes the bravest man is apt to be shaken. Gladstone Bott was only human. It was with a sinking heart that he watched his opponent heave and sway on the tenth tee; and when the ball once more flew straight and far down the course a strange weakness seemed to come over him. For the first time he lost his morale and topped. The ball trickled into the long grass, and after three fruitless stabs at it with a niblick he picked up, and the match was squared.

At the eleventh Bradbury Fisher also topped, and his tee-shot, though nice and straight, travelled only a couple of feet. He had to scramble to halve in eight.

The twelfth was another short hole; and Bradbury, unable to curb the fine, careless rapture which had crept into his game, had the misfortune to overshoot the green by some sixty yards, thus enabling his opponent to take the lead once more.

The thirteenth and fourteenth were halved, but Bradbury, driving another long ball, won the fifteenth, squaring the match.

It seemed to Bradbury Fisher, as he took his stand on the sixteenth tee, that he now had the situation well in hand. At the thirteenth and fourteenth his drive had flickered, but on the fifteenth it had come back in all its glorious vigour and there appeared to be no reason to suppose that it had not come to stay. He recollected exactly how he had done that last colossal slosh, and he now prepared to reproduce the movements precisely as before. The great thing to remember was to hold the breath on the back-swing and not to release it before the moment of impact. Also, the eyes should not be closed until late in the

down-swing. All great golfers have their little secrets, and that was Bradbury's.

With these aids to success firmly fixed in his mind, Bradbury Fisher prepared to give the ball the nastiest bang that a golf-ball had ever had since Edward Blackwell was in his prime. He drew in his breath and, with lungs expanded to their fullest capacity, heaved back on to his large, flat right foot. Then, clenching his teeth, he lashed out.

When he opened his eyes, they fell upon a horrid spectacle. Either he had closed those eyes too soon or else he had breathed too precipitately—whatever the cause, the ball, which should have gone due south, was travelling with great speed sou'-sou'-east. And, even as he gazed, it curved to earth and fell into as uninviting a bit of rough as he had ever penetrated. And he was a man who had spent much time in many roughs.

Leaving Gladstone Bott to continue his imitation of a spavined octogenarian rolling peanuts with a toothpick, Bradbury Fisher, followed by his caddie, set out on the long trail into the jungle.

Hope did not altogether desert him as he walked. In spite of its erratic direction, the ball had been so shrewdly smitten that it was not far from the green. Provided luck was with him and the lie not too desperate, a mashie would put him on the carpet. It was only when he reached the rough and saw what had happened that his heart sank. There the ball lay, half hidden in the grass, while above it waved the straggling tentacle of some tough-looking shrub. Behind it was a stone, and behind the stone, at just the elevation required to catch the back-swing of the club, was a tree. And, by an ironical stroke of fate which drew from Bradbury a hollow, bitter laugh, only a few feet to the right was a beautiful smooth piece of turf from which it would have been a pleasure to play one's second.

Dully, Bradbury looked to see how Bott was getting on. And then suddenly, as he found that Bott was completely invisible behind the belt of bushes through which he had just passed, a voice seemed to whisper to him, "Why not?"

Bradbury Fisher, remember, had spent thirty years in Wall Street.

It was at this moment that he realized that he was not alone. His caddie was standing at his side.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Bradbury Fisher gazed upon the caddie, whom until now he had not had any occasion to observe with any closeness.

The caddie was not a boy. He was a man, apparently in the middle forties, with bushy eyebrows and a walrus moustache; and there was something about his appearance which suggested to Bradbury that here was a kindred spirit. He reminded Bradbury a little of Spike Huggins, the safe-blower, who had been a fresher with him at Sing-Sing. It seemed to him that this caddie could be trusted in a delicate matter involving secrecy and silence. Had he been some babbling urchin, the risk might have been too great.

"Caddie," said Bradbury.

"Sir?" said the caddie.

"Yours is an ill-paid job," said Bradbury.

"It is, indeed, sir," said the caddie.

"Would you like to earn fifty dollars?"

"I would prefer to earn a hundred."

"I meant a hundred," said Bradbury.

He produced a roll of bills from his pocket, and peeled off one of that value. Then, stooping, he picked up his ball and placed it on the little oasis of turf. The caddie bowed intelligently.

"You mean to say," cried Gladstone Bott, a few moments later, "that you were out with your second? With your second!"

"I had a stroke of luck."

"You're sure it wasn't about six strokes of luck?"

"My ball was right out in the open in an excellent lie."

"Oh!" said Gladstone Bott, shortly.

"I have four for it, I think."

"One down," said Gladstone Bott.

"And two to play," trilled Bradbury.

It was with a light heart that Bradbury Fisher teed up on the seventeenth. The match, he felt, was as good as over. The whole essence of golf is to discover a way of getting out of rough without losing strokes; and with this sensible, broadminded man of the world caddying for him he seemed to have discovered the ideal way. It cost him scarcely a pang when he saw his drive slice away into a tangle of long grass, but for the sake of appearances he affected a little chagrin.

"Tut, tut!" he said.

"I shouldn't worry," said Gladstone Bott. "You will

THE HEART OF A GOOF

probably find it sitting upon an india-rubber tee which someone has dropped there."

He spoke sardonically, and Bradbury did not like his manner. But then he never had liked Gladstone Bott's manner, so what of that? He made his way to where the ball had fallen. It was lying under a bush.

"Caddie," said Bradbury.

"Sir?" said the caddie.

"A hundred?"

"And fifty."

"And fifty," said Bradbury Fisher.

Gladstone Bott was still toiling along the fairway when Bradbury reached the green.

"How many?" he asked, eventually winning to the goal.

"On in two," said Bradbury. "And you?"

"Playing seven."

"Then let me see. If you take two putts, which is most unlikely, I shall have six for the hole and match."

A minute later Bradbury had picked up his ball out of the cup. He stood there, basking in the sunshine, his heart glowing with quiet happiness. It seemed to him that he had never seen the countryside looking so beautiful. The birds appeared to be singing as they had never sung before. The trees and the rolling turf had taken on a charm beyond anything he had ever encountered. Even Gladstone Bott looked almost bearable.

"A very pleasant match," he said, cordially, "conducted throughout in the most sporting spirit. At one time I thought you were going to pull it off, old man, but there—class will tell."

"I will now make my report," said the caddie with the walrus moustache.

"Do so," said Gladstone Bott, briefly.

Bradbury Fisher stared at the man with blanched cheeks. The sun had ceased to shine, the birds had stopped singing. The trees and the rolling turf looked pretty rotten, and Gladstone Bott perfectly foul. His heart was leaden with a hideous dread.

"Your report? Your—your report? What do you mean?"

"You don't suppose," said Gladstone Bott, "that I would play you an important match unless I had detectives watching you, do you? This gentleman is from the Quick Results Agency. What have you to report?" he said, turning to the caddie.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

The caddy removed his bushy eyebrows, and with a quick gesture swept off his moustache.

"On the twelfth inst.," he began in a monotonous, sing-song voice, "acting upon instructions received, I made my way to the Goldenville Golf Links in order to observe the movements of the man Fisher. I had adopted for the occasion the Number Three disguise and——"

"All right, all right," said Gladstone Bott, impatiently. "You can skip all that. Come down to what happened at the sixteenth."

The caddie looked wounded, but he bowed deferentially.

"At the sixteenth hole the man Fisher moved his ball into what—from his actions and furtive manner—I deduced to be a more favourable position."

"Ah!" said Gladstone Bott.

"On the seventeenth the man Fisher picked up his ball and threw it with a movement of the wrist on to the green."

"It's a lie. A foul and contemptible lie," shouted Bradbury Fisher.

"Realizing that the man Fisher might adopt this attitude, sir," said the caddie, "I took the precaution of snapshotting him in the act with my miniature wrist-watch camera, the detective's best friend."

Bradbury Fisher covered his face with his hands and uttered a hollow groan.

"My match," said Gladstone Bott, with vindictive triumph. "I'll trouble you to deliver that butler to me f.o.b. at my residence not later than noon tomorrow. Oh yes, and I was forgetting. You owe me three railroads."

Blizzard, dignified but kindly, met Bradbury in the Byzantine hall on his return home.

"I trust your golf-match terminated satisfactorily, sir?" said the butler.

A pang, almost too poignant to be borne, shot through Bradbury. "No, Blizzard," he said. "No. Thank you for your kind inquiry, but I was not in luck."

"Too bad, sir," said Blizzard, sympathetically. "I trust the prize at stake was not excessive?"

"Well—er—well, it was rather big. I should like to speak to you about that a little later, Blizzard."

"At any time that is suitable to you, sir. If you will ring for one of the assistant-under-footmen when you desire to see me, sir, he will find me in my pantry. Meanwhile, sir, this cable arrived for you a short while back."

Bradbury took the envelope listlessly. He had been expecting a communication from his London agents announcing that they had bought Kent and Sussex, for which he had instructed them to make a firm offer just before he left England. No doubt this was their cable.

He opened the envelope, and started as if it had contained a scorpion. It was from his wife.

"Returning immediately 'Aquitania'," (it ran). "Docking Friday night. Meet without fail."

Bradbury stared at the words, frozen to the marrow. Although he had been in a sort of trance ever since that dreadful moment on the seventeenth green, his great brain had not altogether ceased to function; and, while driving home in the car, he had sketched out roughly a plan of action which, he felt, might meet the crisis. Assuming that Mrs. Fisher was to remain abroad for another month, he had practically decided to buy a daily paper, insert in it a front-page story announcing the death of Blizzard, forward the clipping to his wife, and then sell his house and move to another neighbourhood. In this way it might be that she would never learn of what had occurred.

But if she was due back next Friday, the scheme fell through and exposure was inevitable.

He wondered dully what had caused her change of plans, and came to the conclusion that some feminine sixth sense must have warned her of peril threatening Blizzard. With a good deal of peevishness he wished that Providence had never endowed women with this sixth sense. A woman with merely five took quite enough handling.

"Sweet suffering soup-spoons!" groaned Bradbury.

"Sir?" said Blizzard.

"Nothing," said Bradbury.

"Very good, sir," said Blizzard.

For a man with anything on his mind, any little trouble calculated to affect the *joie de vivre*, there are few spots less cheering than the Customs sheds of New York. Draughts

whistle dismally there—now to, now fro. Strange noises are heard. Customs officials chew gum and lurk grimly in the shadows, like tigers awaiting the luncheon-gong. It is not surprising that Bradbury's spirits, low when he reached the place, should have sunk to zero long before the gangplank was lowered and the passengers began to stream down it.

His wife was among the first to land. How beautiful she looked, thought Bradbury, as he watched her. And, alas, how intimidating. His tastes had always lain in the direction of spirited women. His first wife had been spirited. So had his second, third, and fourth. And the one at the moment holding office was perhaps the most spirited of the whole platoon. For one long instant, as he went to meet her, Bradbury Fisher was conscious of a regret that he had not married one of those meek, mild girls who suffer uncomplainingly at their husband's hands in the more hectic type of feminine novel. What he felt he could have done with at the moment was the sort of wife who thinks herself dashed lucky if the other half of the sketch does not drag her round the billiard-room by her hair, kicking her the while with spiked shoes.

Three conversational openings presented themselves to him as he approached her.

"Darling, there is something I want to tell you——"

"Dearest, I have a small confession to make——"

"Sweetheart, I don't know if by any chance you remember Blizzard, our butler. Well, it's like this——"

But, in the event, it was she who spoke first.

"Oh, Bradbury," she cried, rushing into his arms, "I've done the most awful thing, and you must try to forgive me!"

Bradbury blinked. He had never seen her in this strange mood before. As she clung to him, she seemed timid, fluttering, and—although a woman who weighed a full hundred and fifty-seven pounds—almost fragile.

"What is it?" he inquired, tenderly. "Has somebody stolen your jewels?"

"No, no."

"Have you been losing money at bridge?"

"No, no. Worse than that."

Bradbury started.

"You didn't sing 'My Little Grey Home in the West' at the ship's concert?" he demanded, eyeing her closely.

"No, no! Ah, how can I tell you? Bradbury, look! You see that man over there?"

Bradbury followed her pointing finger. Standing in an attitude of negligent dignity beside a pile of trunks under the letter V was a tall, stout, ambassadorial man, at the very sight of whom, even at this distance, Bradbury Fisher felt an odd sense of inferiority. His pendulous cheeks, his curving waistcoat, his protruding eyes, and the sequence of rolling chins combined to produce in Bradbury that instinctive feeling of being in the presence of a superior which we experience when meeting scratch golfers, head-waiters of fashionable restaurants, and traffic-policemen. A sudden pang of suspicion pierced him.

"Well?" he said, hoarsely. "What of him?"

"Bradbury, you must not judge me too harshly. We were thrown together and I was tempted——"

"Woman," thundered Bradbury Fisher, "who is this man?"

"His name is Vosper."

"And what is there between you and him, and when did it start, and why and how and where?"

Mrs. Fisher dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"It was at the Duke of Bootle's, Bradbury. I was invited there for the week-end."

"And this man was there?"

"Yes."

"Ha! Proceed!"

"The moment I set eyes on him, something seemed to go all over me."

"Indeed!"

"At first it was his mere appearance. I felt that I had dreamed of such a man all my life, and that for all these wasted years I had been putting up with the second-best."

"Oh, you did, eh? Really? Is that so? You did, did you?" snorted Bradbury Fisher.

"I couldn't help it, Bradbury. I know I have always seemed so devoted to Blizzard, and so I was. But, honestly, there is no comparison between them—really there isn't. You should see the way Vosper stood behind the Duke's chair. Like a high priest presiding over some mystic religious ceremony. And his voice when he asks you if you will have sherry or hock! Like the music of some wonderful organ. I couldn't resist him. I approached him delicately, and found that he was willing to

come to America. He had been eighteen years with the Duke, and he told me he couldn't stand the sight of the back of his head any longer. So——"

Bradbury Fisher reeled.

"This man—this Vosper. Who is he?"

"Why, I'm telling you, honey. He was the Duke's butler, and now he's ours. Oh, you know how impulsive I am. Honestly, it wasn't till we were half-way across the Atlantic that I suddenly said to myself, 'What about Blizzard?' What am I to do, Bradbury? I simply haven't the nerve to fire Blizzard. And yet what will happen when he walks into his pantry and finds Vosper there? Oh, think, Bradbury, think!"

Bradbury Fisher was thinking—and for the first time in a week without agony.

"Evangeline," he said, gravely, "this is awkward."

"I know."

"Extremely awkward."

"I know, I know. But surely you can think of some way out of the muddle!"

"I may. I cannot promise, but I may." He pondered deeply. "Ha! I have it! It is just possible that I may be able to induce Gladstone Bott to take on Blizzard."

"Do you really think he would?"

"He may—if I play my cards carefully. At any rate, I will try to persuade him. For the moment you and Vosper had better remain in New York, while I go home and put the negotiations in train. If I am successful, I will let you know."

"Do try your very hardest."

"I think I shall be able to manage it. Gladstone and I are old friends, and he would stretch a point to oblige me. But let this be a lesson to you, Evangeline."

"Oh, I will."

"By the way," said Bradbury Fisher, "I am cabling my London agents today to instruct them to buy J. H. Taylor's shirt-stud for my collection."

"Quite right, Bradbury, darling. And anything else you want in that way you will get, won't you?"

"I will," said Bradbury Fisher.

CHAPTER III

KEEPING IN WITH VOSPER

THE young man in the heather-mixture plus fours, who for some time had been pacing the terrace above the ninth green like an imprisoned jaguar, flung himself into a chair and uttered a snort of anguish.

"Women," said the young man, "are the limit."

The Oldest Member, ever ready to sympathize with youth in affliction, turned a courteous ear.

"What," he inquired, "has the sex been pulling on you now?"

"My wife is the best little woman in the world."

"I can readily believe it."

"But," continued the young man, "I would like to bean her with a brick, and bean her good. I told her, when she wanted to play a round with me this afternoon, that we must start early, as the days are drawing in. What did she do? Having got into her things, she decided that she didn't like the look of them and made a complete change. She then powdered her nose for ten minutes. And when finally I got her on to the first tee, an hour late, she went back into the clubhouse to phone to her dressmaker. It will be dark before we've played six holes. If I had my way, golf-clubs would make a rigid rule that no wife be allowed to play with her husband."

The Oldest Member nodded gravely.

"Until this is done," he agreed, "the millennium cannot but be set back indefinitely. Although we are told nothing about it, there can be little doubt that one of Job's chief trials was that his wife insisted on playing golf with him. And, as we are on this topic, it may interest you to hear a story."

"I have no time to listen to stories now."

"If your wife is telephoning to her dressmaker, you have ample time," replied the Sage. "The story which I am about to relate deals with a man named Bradbury Fisher——"

"You told me that one."

"I think not."

"Yes, you did. Bradbury Fisher was a Wall Street millionaire who had an English butler named Blizzard, who had been fifteen years with an earl. Another millionaire coveted Blizzard, and they played a match for him, and Fisher lost. But, just as he was wondering how he could square himself with his wife, who valued Blizzard very highly, Mrs. Fisher turned up from England with a still finer butler named Vosper, who had been eighteen years with a duke. So all ended happily."

"Yes," said the Sage. "You appear to have the facts correctly. The tale which I am about to relate is a sequel to that story, and runs as follows:

You say (began the Oldest Member) that all ended happily. That was Bradbury Fisher's opinion, too. It seemed to Bradbury in the days that followed Vosper's taking of office as though Providence, recognizing his sterling merits, had gone out of its way to smooth the path of life for him. The weather was fine; his handicap, after remaining stationary for many years, had begun to decrease; and his old friend Rupert Worple had just come out of Sing-Sing, where he had been taking a post-graduate course, and was paying him a pleasant visit at his house in Goldenville, Long Island.

The only thing, in fact, that militated against Bradbury's complete tranquillity was the information he had just received from his wife that her mother, Mrs. Lora Smith Maplebury, was about to infest the home for an indeterminate stay.

Bradbury had never liked his wives' mothers. His first wife, he recalled, had had a particularly objectionable mother. So had his second, third, and fourth. And the present holder of the title appeared to him to be scratch. She had a habit of sniffing in a significant way whenever she looked at him, and this can never make for a spirit of easy comradeship between man and woman. Given a free hand, he would have tied a brick to her neck and dropped her in the water-hazard at the second; but, realizing that this was but a Utopian dream, he sensibly decided to make the best of things and to content himself with jumping out of the window whenever she came into a room in which he happened to be sitting.

His mood, therefore, as he sat in his Louis Quinze library on the evening on which this story opens, was perfectly contented.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

And when there was a knock at the door and Vosper entered, no foreboding came to warn him that the quiet peace of his life was about to be shattered.

"Might I have a word, sir?" said the butler.

"Certainly, Vosper. What is it?"

Bradbury Fisher beamed upon the man. For the hundredth time, as he eyed him, he reflected how immeasurably superior he was to the departed Blizzard. Blizzard had been fifteen years with an earl, and no one disputes that earls are all very well in their way. But they are not dukes. About a butler who has served in a ducal household there is something which cannot be duplicated by one who has passed the formative years of his butlerhood in humbler surroundings.

"It has to do with Mr. Worple, sir."

"What about him?"

"Mr. Worple," said the butler, gravely, "must go. I do not like his laugh, sir."

"Eh?"

"It is too hearty, sir. It would not have done for the Duke."

Bradbury Fisher was an easy-going man, but he belonged to a free race. For freedom his fathers had fought, and if he had heard the story correctly, bled. His eyes flashed.

"Oh!" he cried. "Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is zat so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let me tell you something, Bill——"

"My name is Hildebrand, sir."

"Well, let me tell you, whatever your scarlet name is, that no butler is going to boss me in my own home. You can darned well go yourself."

"Very good, sir."

Vosper withdrew like an ambassador who has received his papers; and presently there was a noise without like hens going through a hedge, and Mrs. Fisher plunged in.

"Bradbury," she cried, "are you mad? Of course, Mr. Worple must go if Vosper says so. Don't you realize that Vosper will leave us if we don't humour him?"

"I should worry about him leaving!"

A strange, set look came into Mrs. Fisher's face.

"Bradbury," she said, "if Vosper leaves us, I shall die. And,

THE HEART OF A GOOF

what is more, just before dying I shall get a divorce. Yes, I will."

"But, darling," gasped Bradbury, "Rupert Worp! Old Rupie Worp! We've been friends all our lives."

"I don't care."

"We were freshers at Sing-Sing together."

"I don't care."

"We were initiated into the same Frat, the dear old Cracka-Bitta-Rock, on the same day."

"I don't care. Heaven has sent me the perfect butler, and I'm not going to lose him."

There was a tense silence.

"Ah, well!" said Bradbury Fisher with a deep sigh.

That night he broke the news to Rupert Worp.

"I never thought," said Rupert Worp sadly, "when we sang together on the glee-club at the old Alma Mater, that it would ever come to this."

"Nor I," said Bradbury Fisher. "But so it must be. You wouldn't have done for the Duke, Rupie, you wouldn't have done for the Duke."

"Good-bye, Number 8,097,564," said Rupert Worp in a low voice.

"Good-bye, Number 8,097,565," whispered Bradbury Fisher.

And with a silent hand-clasp the two friends parted.

With the going of Rupert Worp a grey cloud seemed to settle upon the glowing radiance of Bradbury Fisher's life. Mrs. Lora Smith Maplebury duly arrived; and, having given a series of penetrating sniffs as he greeted her in the entrance-hall, dug herself in and settled down to what looked like the visit of a lifetime. And then, just as Bradbury's cup seemed to be full to over-flowing, Mrs. Fisher drew him aside one evening.

"Bradbury," said Mrs. Fisher. "I have some good news for you."

"Is your mother leaving?" asked Bradbury eagerly.

"Of course not. I said good news. I am taking up golf again."

Bradbury Fisher clutched at the arms of his chair, and an ashen pallor spread itself over his clean-cut face.

"What did you say?" he muttered.

"I'm taking up golf again. Won't it be nice? We'll be able to play together every day."

Bradbury Fisher shuddered strongly. It was many years since he had played with his wife, but, like an old wound, the memory of it still troubled him occasionally.

"It was Vosper's idea."

"Vosper!"

A sudden seething fury gripped Bradbury. This pestilent butler was an absolute home-wrecker. He toyed with the idea of poisoning Vosper's port. Surely, if he were to do so, a capable lawyer could smooth things over and get him off with, at the worst, a nominal fine.

"Vosper says I need exercise. He says he does not like my wheezing."

"Your what?"

"My wheezing. I do wheeze, you know."

"Well, so does he."

"Yes, but a good butler is expected to wheeze. A wheezing woman is quite a different thing. My wheezing would never have done for the Duke, Vosper says."

Bradbury Fisher breathed tensely.

"Ha!" he said.

"I think it's so nice of him, Bradbury. It shows he has our interests at heart, just like a faithful old retainer. He says wheezing is an indication of heightened blood-pressure and can be remedied by gentle exercise. So we'll have our first round tomorrow morning, shall we?"

"Just as you say," said Bradbury dully. "I had a sort of date to make one of a foursome with three men at the club, but——"

"Oh, you don't want to play with those silly men any more. It will be much nicer, just you and I playing together."

It has always seemed to me a strange and unaccountable thing that nowadays, when gloom is at such a premium in the world's literature and all around us stern young pessimists are bringing home the bacon with their studies in the greyly grim, no writer has thought of turning his pen to a realistic portrayal of the golfing wife. No subject could be more poignant, and yet it has been completely neglected. One can only suppose that even modern novelists feel that the line should be drawn somewhere.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Bradbury Fisher's emotions, as he stood by the first tee watching his wife prepare to drive off, were far beyond my poor power to describe. Compared with him at that moment, the hero of a novel of the Middle West would have seemed almost offensively chirpy. This was the woman he loved, and she was behaving in a manner that made the iron sink deep into his soul.

Most women golfers are elaborate wagglers, but none that Bradbury had ever seen had made quite such a set of Swedish exercises out of the simple act of laying the clubhead behind the ball and raising it over the right shoulder. For fully a minute, it seemed to him, Mrs. Fisher fiddled and pawed at the ball; while Bradbury, realizing that there are eighteen tees on a course and that this Russian Ballet stuff was consequently going to happen at least seventeen times more, quivered in agony and clenched his hands till the knuckles stood out white under the strain. Then she drove, and the ball trickled down the hill into a patch of rough some five yards distant.

"Tee-hee!" said Mrs. Fisher.

Bradbury uttered a sharp cry. He was married to a golfing giggler.

"What did I do then?"

"God help you, woman," said Bradbury, "you jerked your head up till I wonder it didn't come off at the neck."

It was at the fourth hole that further evidence was afforded the wretched man of how utterly a good, pure woman may change her nature when once she gets out on the links. Mrs. Fisher had played her eleventh, and, having walked the intervening three yards, was about to play her twelfth when behind them, grouped upon the tee, Bradbury perceived two of his fellow-members of the club. Remorse and shame pierced him.

"One minute, honey," he said, as his life's partner took a stranglehold on her mashie and was about to begin the movements. "We'd better let these men through."

"What men?"

"We're holding up a couple of fellows. I'll wave to them."

"You will do nothing of the sort," cried Mrs. Fisher. "The idea!"

"But, darling——"

"Why should they go through us? We started before them."

"But, pettie——"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"They shall not pass!" said Mrs. Fisher. And, raising her mashie, she dug a grim divot out of the shrinking turf. With bowed head, Bradbury followed her on the long, long trail.

The sun was sinking as they came at last to journey's end.

"How right Vosper is!" said Mrs. Fisher, nestling into the cushions of the automobile. "I feel ever so much better already."

"Do you?" said Bradbury wanly. "Do you?"

"We'll play again tomorrow afternoon," said his wife.

Bradbury Fisher was a man of steel. He endured for a week. But on the last day of the week Mrs. Fisher insisted on taking as a companion on the round Alfred, her pet Airedale. In vain Bradbury spoke of the Green Committee and their prejudice against dogs on the links. Mrs. Fisher—and Bradbury, as he heard the ghastly words, glanced involuntarily up at the summer sky, as if preparing to dodge the lightning-bolt which could scarcely fail to punish such blasphemy—said that the Green Committee were a lot of silly, fussy old men, and she had no patience with them.

So Alfred came along—barking at Bradbury as he endeavoured to concentrate on the smooth pronation of the wrists, pounding ahead to frolic round distant players who were shaping for delicate chip-shots, and getting a deep toe-hold on the turf of each successive green. Hell, felt Bradbury, must be something like this; and he wished that he had led a better life.

But that retribution which waits on all, both small and great, who defy Green Committees had marked Alfred down. Taking up a position just behind Mrs. Fisher as she began her down swing on the seventh, he received so shrewd a blow on his right foreleg that with a sharp yelp he broke into a gallop, raced through a foursome on the sixth green, and, charging across country, dived headlong into the water-hazard on the second; where he remained until Bradbury, who had been sent in pursuit, waded in and fished him out.

Mrs. Fisher came panting up, full of concern.

"What shall we do? The poor little fellow is quite lame. I know, you can carry him, Bradbury."

Bradbury Fisher uttered a low, bleating sound. The water had had the worst effect on the animal. Even when dry, Alfred was always a dog of powerful scent. Wet, he had become

THE HEART OF A GOOF

definitely one of the six best-smellers. His aroma had what the advertisement-writers call "strong memory value"

"Carry him? To the car, do you mean?"

"Of course not. Round the links. I don't want to miss a day's golf. You can put him down when you play your shots."

For a long instant Bradbury hesitated. The words "Is zat so?" trembled on his lips.

"Very well," he said, swallowing twice.

That night, in his du Barri bedroom, Bradbury Fisher lay sleepless far into the dawn. A crisis, he realized, had come in his domestic affairs. Things, he saw clearly, could not go on like this. It was not merely the awful spiritual agony of playing these daily rounds of golf with his wife that was so hard to endure. The real trouble was that the spectacle of her on the links was destroying his ideals, sapping away that love and respect which should have been as imperishable as steel.

To a good man his wife should be a goddess, a being far above him to whom he can offer worship and reverence, a beacon-star guiding him over the tossing seas of life. She should be ever on a pedestal and in a shrine. And when she waggles for a minute and a half and then jerks her head and tops the ball, she ceases to be so. And Mrs. Fisher was not merely a head-lifter and a super-waggler; she was a scoffer at Golf's most sacred things. She held up scratchmen. She omitted to replace divots. She spoke lightly of Green Committees.

The sun was gilding Goldenville in its morning glory when Bradbury made up his mind. He would play with her no more. To do so would be fair neither to himself nor to her. At any moment, he felt, she might come out on the links in high heels or stop to powder her nose on the green while frenzied foursomes waited to play their approach-shots. And then love would turn to hate, and he and she would go through life estranged. Better to end it now, while he still retained some broken remains of the old esteem.

He had got everything neatly arranged. He would plead business in the City and sneak off each day to play on another course five miles away.

"Darling," he said at breakfast, "I'm afraid we shan't be able to have our game for a week or so. I shall have to be at the office early and late."

"Oh, what a shame!" said Mrs. Fisher.

"You will, no doubt, be able to get a game with the pro. or somebody. You know how bitterly this disappoints me. I had come to look on our daily round as the bright spot of the day. But business is business."

"I thought you had retired from business," said Mrs. Lora Smith Maplebury, with a sniff that cracked a coffee-cup.

Bradbury Fisher looked at her coldly. She was a lean, pale-eyed woman with high cheek-bones, and for the hundredth time since she had come into his life he felt how intensely she needed a punch on the nose.

"Not altogether," he said. "I still retain large interests in this and that, and I am at the moment occupied with affairs which I cannot mention without revealing secrets which might—which would—which are—— Well, anyway, I've got to go to the office."

"Oh, quite," said Mrs. Maplebury

"What do you mean, quite?" demanded Bradbury.

"I mean just what I say. Quite!"

"Why quite?"

"Why not quite? I suppose I can say 'Quite!' can't I?"

"Oh, quite," said Bradbury.

He kissed his wife and left the room. He felt a little uneasy. There had been something in the woman's manner which had caused him a vague foreboding.

Had he been able to hear the conversation that followed his departure, he would have been still more uneasy.

"Suspicious!" said Mrs. Maplebury.

"What is?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"That man's behaviour."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you observe him closely while he was speaking?"

"No."

"The tip of his nose wiggled. Always distrust a man who wiggles the tip of his nose."

"I am sure Bradbury would not deceive you."

"So am I. But he might try to."

"I don't understand, mother. Do you mean you think Bradbury is not going to the office?"

"I am sure he is not."

"You think——?"

"I do."

"You are suggesting——?"

"I am."

"You would imply——?"

"I would."

A moan escaped Mrs. Fisher.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she cried. "If I thought Bradbury was untrue to me, what I wouldn't do to that poor clam!"

"I certainly think that the least you can do, as a good womanly woman, is to have a capable lawyer watching your interests."

"But we can easily find out if he is at the office. We can ring them up on the phone and ask."

"And be told that he is in conference. He will not have neglected to arrange for that."

"Then what shall I do?"

"Wait," said Mrs. Maplebury. "Wait and be watchful."

The shades of night were falling when Bradbury returned to his home. He was fatigued but jubilant. He had played forty-five holes in the society of his own sex. He had kept his head down and his eye on the ball. He had sung negro spirituals in the locker-room.

"I trust, Bradbury," said Mrs. Maplebury, "that you are not tired after your long day?"

"A little," said Bradbury. "Nothing to signify." He turned radiantly to his wife.

"Honey," he said, "you remember the trouble I was having with my iron? Well, today——"

He stopped aghast. Like every good husband it had always been his practice hitherto to bring his golfing troubles to his wife, and in many a cosy after-dinner chat he had confided to her the difficulty he was having in keeping his iron-shots straight. And he had only just stopped himself now from telling her that today he had been hitting 'em sweetly on the meat right down the middle.

"Your iron?"

"Er—ah—yes. I have large interests in Iron—as also in Steel, Jute, Woollen Fabrics, and Consolidated Peanuts. A gang has been trying to hammer down my stock. Today I fixed them."

"You did, did you?" said Mrs. Maplebury.

"I said I did," retorted Bradbury defiantly

"So did I. I said you did, did you?"

"What do you mean, did you?"

"Well, you did, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Exactly what I said. You did. Didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Yes, you did!" said Mrs. Maplebury.

Once again Bradbury felt vaguely uneasy. There was nothing in the actual dialogue which had just taken place to cause him alarm—indeed, considered purely as dialogue, it was bright and snappy and well calculated to make things gay about the home. But once more there had been a subtle something in his mother-in-law's manner which had jarred upon him. He mumbled and went off to dress for dinner.

"Ha!" said Mrs. Maplebury, as the door closed.

Such, then, was the position of affairs in the Fisher home. And now that I have arrived thus far in my story and have shown you this man systematically deceiving the woman he had vowed—at one of the most exclusive altars in New York—to love and cherish, you—if you are the sort of husband I hope you are—must be saying to yourself: "But what of Bradbury Fisher's conscience?" Remorse, you feel, must long since have begun to gnaw at his vitals; and the thought suggests itself to you that surely by this time the pangs of self-reproach must have interfered seriously with his short game, even if not as yet sufficiently severe to affect his driving off the tee.

You are overlooking the fact that Bradbury Fisher's was the trained and educated conscience of a man who had passed a large portion of his life in Wall Street; and years of practice had enabled him to reduce the control of it to a science. Many a time in the past, when an active operator on the Street, he had done things to the Small Investor which would have caused raised eyebrows in the fo'c'sle of a pirate sloop—and done them without a blush. He was not the man, therefore, to suffer torment merely because he was slipping one over on the Little Woman.

Occasionally he would wince a trifle at the thought of what would happen if she ever found out; but apart from that, I am doing no more than state the plain truth when I say that Bradbury Fisher did not care a whoop.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Besides, at this point his golf suddenly underwent a remarkable improvement. He had always been a long driver, and quite abruptly he found that he was judging them nicely with the putter. Two weeks after he had started on his campaign of deception he amazed himself and all who witnessed the performance by cracking a hundred for the first time in his career. And every golfer knows that in the soul of the man who does that there is no room for remorse. Conscience may sting the player who is going round in a hundred and ten, but when it tries to make itself unpleasant to the man who is doing ninety-sevens and ninety-eights, it is simply wasting its time.

I will do Bradbury Fisher justice. He did regret that he was not in a position to tell his wife all about that first ninety-nine of his. He would have liked to take her into a corner and show her with the aid of a poker and a lump of coal just how he had chipped up to the pin on the last hole and left himself a simple two-foot putt. And the forlorn feeling of being unable to confide his triumphs to a sympathetic ear deepened a week later when, miraculously achieving ninety-six in the medal round, he qualified for the sixth sixteen in the annual invitation tournament of the club to which he had attached himself.

"Shall I?" he mused, eyeing her wistfully across the Queen Anne table in the Crystal Boudoir, to which they had retired to drink their after-dinner coffee. "Better not, better not," whispered Prudence in his ear.

"Bradbury," said Mrs. Fisher.

"Yes, darling?"

"Have you been hard at work today?"

"Yes, precious. Very, very hard at work."

"Ho!" said Mrs. Maplebury.

"What did you say?" said Bradbury.

"I said ho!"

"What do you mean, ho?"

"Just ho. There is no harm, I imagine, in my saying ho, if I wish to."

"Oh no," said Bradbury. "By no means. Not at all. Pray do so."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Maplebury. "Ho!"

"You do have to slave at the office, don't you?" said Mrs. Fisher.

"I do, indeed."

"It must be a great strain."

"A terrible strain. Yes, yes, a terrible strain."

"Then you won't object to giving it up, will you?"

Bradbury started.

"Giving it up?"

"Giving up going to the office. The fact is, dear," said Mrs. Fisher, "Vosper has complained."

"What about?"

"About you going to the office. He says he has never been in the employment of anyone engaged in commerce, and he doesn't like it. The Duke looked down on commerce very much. So I'm afraid, darling, you will have to give it up."

Bradbury Fisher stared before him, a strange singing in his ears. The blow had been so sudden that he was stunned.

His fingers picked feverishly at the arm of his chair. He had paled to the very lips. If the office was barred to him, on what pretext could he sneak away from home? And sneak he must for tomorrow and the day after the various qualifying sixteens were to play the match-rounds for the cups; and it was monstrous and impossible that he should not be there. He must be there. He had done a ninety-six, and the next best medal score in his sixteen was a hundred and one. For the first time in his life he had before him the prospect of winning a cup; and, highly though the poets have spoken of love, that emotion is not to be compared with the frenzy which grips a twenty-four-handicap man who sees himself within reach of a cup.

Blindly he tottered from the room and sought his study. He wanted to be alone. He had to think, think.

The evening paper was lying on the table. Automatically he picked it up and ran his eye over the front page. And, as he did so, he uttered a sharp exclamation.

He leaped from his chair and returned to the boudoir, carrying the paper.

"Well, what do you know about this?" said Bradbury Fisher, in a hearty voice.

"We know a great deal about a good many things," said Mrs. Maplebury.

"What is it, Bradbury?" said Mrs. Fisher.

"I'm afraid I shall have to leave you for a couple of days. Great nuisance, but there it is. But, of course, I must be there."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Where?"

"Ah, where?" said Mrs. Maplebury.

"At Sing-Sing. I see in the paper that tomorrow and the day after they are inaugurating the new Osborne Stadium. All the men of my class will be attending, and I must go, too."

"Must you really?"

"I certainly must. Not to do so would be to show a lack of college spirit. The boys are playing Yale, and there is to be a big dinner afterwards. I shouldn't wonder if I had to make a speech. But don't worry, honey," he said, kissing his wife affectionately. "I shall be back before you know I've gone." He turned sharply to Mrs. Maplebury. "I beg your pardon?" he said, stiffly.

"I did not speak."

"I thought you did."

"I merely inhaled. I simply drew in air through my nostrils. If I am not at liberty to draw in air through my nostrils in your house, pray inform me."

"I would prefer that you didn't," said Bradbury, between set teeth.

"Then I would suffocate."

"Yes," said Bradbury Fisher.

Of all the tainted millionaires who, after years of plundering the widow and the orphan, have devoted the evening of their life to the game of golf, few can ever have been so boisterously exhilarated as was Bradbury Fisher when, two nights later, he returned to his home. His dreams had all come true. He had won his way to the foot of the rainbow. In other words, he was the possessor of a small pewter cup, value three dollars, which he had won by beating a feeble old gentleman with one eye in the final match of the competition for the sixth sixteen at the Squashy Hollow Golf Club Invitation Tournament.

He entered the house, radiant.

"Tra-la!" sang Bradbury Fisher. "Tra-la!"

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said Vosper, who had encountered him in the hall.

"Eh? Oh, nothing. Just tra-la."

"Very good, sir."

Bradbury Fisher looked at Vosper. For the first time it seemed to sweep over him like a wave that Vosper was an

uncommonly good fellow. The past was forgotten, and he beamed upon Vosper like the rising sun.

"Vosper," he said, "what wages are you getting?"

"I regret to say, sir," replied the butler, "that, at the moment, the precise amount of the salary of which I am in receipt has slipped my mind. I could refresh my memory by consulting my books, if you so desire it, sir."

"Never mind. Whatever it is, it's doubled."

"I am obliged, sir. You will, no doubt, send me a written memo. to that effect?"

"Twenty, if you like."

"One will be ample, sir."

Bradbury curvetted past him through the baronial hall and into the Crystal Boudoir. His wife was there alone.

"Mother has gone to bed," she said. "She has a bad headache."

"You don't say!" said Bradbury. It was as if everything was conspiring to make this a day of days. "Well, it's great to be back in the old home."

"Did you have a good time?"

"Capital."

"You saw all your old friends?"

"Every one of them."

"Did you make a speech at the dinner?"

"Did I! They rolled out of their seats and the waiters swept them up with dusters."

"A very big dinner, I suppose?"

"Enormous."

"How was the football game?"

"Best I've ever seen. We won. Number 432,986 made a hundred-and-ten-yard run for a touchdown in the last five minutes."

"Really?"

"And that takes a bit of doing, with a ball and chain round your ankle, believe me!"

"Bradbury," said Mrs. Fisher, "where have you been these last two days?"

Bradbury's heart missed a beat. His wife was looking exactly like her mother. It was the first time he had ever been able to believe that she could be Mrs. Maplebury's daughter.

"Been? Why, I'm telling you."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Bradbury," said Mrs. Fisher, "just one word. Have you seen the paper this morning?"

"Why, no. What with all the excitement of meeting the boys and this and that——"

"Then you have not seen that the inauguration of the new Stadium at Sing-Sing was postponed on account of an outbreak of mumps in the prison?"

Bradbury gulped.

"There was no dinner, no football game, no gathering of Old Grads—nothing! So—where have you been, Bradbury?"

Bradbury gulped again.

"You're sure you haven't got this wrong?" he said at length.

"Quite."

"I mean, sure it wasn't some other place?"

"Quite."

"Sing-Sing? You got the name correctly?"

"Quite. Where, Bradbury, have you been these last two days?"

"Well—er——"

Mrs. Fisher coughed dryly.

"I merely ask out of curiosity. The facts will, of course, come out in court."

"In court!"

"Naturally I propose to place this affair in the hands of my lawyer immediately."

Bradbury started convulsively.

"You mustn't!"

"I certainly shall."

A shudder shook Bradbury from head to foot. He felt worse than he had done when his opponent in the final had laid him a stymie on the last green, thereby squaring the match and taking it to the nineteenth hole.

"I will tell you all," he muttered.

"Well?"

"Well—it was like this."

"Yes?"

"Er—like this. In fact, this way."

"Proceed."

Bradbury clenched his hands; and, as far as that could be managed, avoided her eye.

"I've been playing golf," he said in a low, toneless voice.

"Playing golf?"

"Yes." Bradbury hesitated. "I don't mean it in an offensive spirit, and no doubt most men would have enjoyed themselves thoroughly, but I—well, I am curiously constituted, angel, and the fact is I simply couldn't stand playing with you any longer. The fault, I am sure, was mine, but—well, there it is. If I had played another round with you, my darling, I think that I should have begun running about in circles, biting my best friends. So I thought it all over, and, not wanting to hurt your feelings by telling you the truth, I stooped to what I might call a ruse. I said I was going to the office; and, instead of going to the office, I went off to Squashy Hollow and played there."

Mrs. Fisher uttered a cry.

"You were there today and yesterday?"

In spite of his trying situation, the yeasty exhilaration which had been upon him when he entered the room returned to Bradbury.

"Was I!" he cried. "You bet your Russian boots I was! Only winning a cup, that's all!"

"You won a cup?"

"You bet your diamond tiara I won a cup. Say, listen," said Bradbury, diving for a priceless Boule table and wrenching a leg off it. "Do you know what happened in the semi-final?" He clasped his fingers over the table-leg in the overlapping grip. "I'm here, see, about fifteen feet off the green. The other fellow lying dead, and I'm playing the like. Best I could hope for was a half, you'll say, eh? Well, listen. I just walked up to that little white ball, and I gave it a little flick, and, believe me or believe me not, that little white ball never stopped running till it plunked into the hole."

He stopped. He perceived that he had been introducing into the debate extraneous and irrelevant matter.

"Honey," he said, fervently, "you mustn't get mad about this. Maybe, if we try again, it will be all right. Give me another chance. Let me come out and play a round tomorrow. I think perhaps your style of play is a thing that wants getting used to. After all, I didn't like olives the first time I tried them. Or whisky. Or caviare, for that matter. Probably if——"

Mrs. Fisher shook her head.

"I shall never play again."

"Oh, but, listen——"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

She looked at him fondly, her eyes dim with happy tears.

"I should have known you better, Bradbury. I suspected you. How foolish I was."

"There, there," said Bradbury.

"It was mother's fault. She put ideas into my head."

There was much that Bradbury would have liked to say about her mother, but he felt that this was not the time.

"And you really forgive me for sneaking off, and playing at Squashy Hollow?"

"Of course."

"Then why not a little round tomorrow?"

"No, Bradbury, I shall never play again. Vosper says I mustn't."

"What!"

"He saw me one morning on the links, and he came to me and told me—quite nicely and respectfully—that it must not occur again. He said with the utmost deference that I was making a spectacle of myself and that this nuisance must now cease. So I gave it up. But it's all right. Vosper thinks that gentle massage will cure my wheezing, so I'm having it every day, and really I do think there's an improvement already."

"Where is Vosper?" said Bradbury, hoarsely.

"You aren't going to be rude to him, Bradbury? He is so sensitive."

But Bradbury Fisher had left the room.

"You rang, sir?" said Vosper, entering the Byzantine smoking-room some few minutes later.

"Yes," said Bradbury. "Vosper, I am a plain, rugged man and I do not know all that there is to be known about these things. So do not be offended if I ask you a question."

"Not at all, sir."

"Tell me, Vosper, did the Duke ever shake hands with you?"

"Once only, sir—mistaking me in a dimly-lit hall for a visiting archbishop."

"Would it be all right for me to shake hands with you now?"

"If you wish it, sir, certainly."

"I want to thank you, Vosper. Mrs. Fisher tells me that you have stopped her playing golf. I think that you have saved my reason, Vosper."

"That is extremely gratifying, sir."

"Your salary is trebled."

"Thank you very much, sir. And, while we are talking, sir, if I might—— There is one other little matter I wished to speak of, sir."

"Shoot, Vosper."

"It concerns Mrs. Maplebury, sir."

"What about her?"

"If I might say so, sir, she would scarcely have done for the Duke."

A sudden wild thrill shot through Bradbury.

"You mean——?" he stammered.

"I mean, sir, that Mrs. Maplebury must go. I make no criticism of Mrs. Maplebury, you will understand, sir. I merely say that she would decidedly not have done for the Duke."

Bradbury drew in his breath sharply.

"Vosper," he said, "the more I hear of that Duke of yours, the more I seem to like him. You really think he would have drawn the line at Mrs. Maplebury?"

"Very firmly, sir."

"Splendid fellow! Splendid fellow! She shall go tomorrow, Vosper."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"And, Vosper."

"Sir?"

"Your salary. It is quadrupled."

"I am greatly obliged, sir."

"Tra-la, Vosper!"

"Tra-la, sir. Will that be all?"

"That will be all. Tra-la!"

"Tra-la, sir," said the butler.

CHAPTER IV

CHESTER FORGETS HIMSELF

THE afternoon was warm and heavy. Butterflies loafed languidly in the sunshine, birds panted in the shady recesses of the trees.

The Oldest Member, snug in his favourite chair, had long since succumbed to the drowsy influence of the weather. His eyes were closed, his chin sunk upon his breast. The pipe which he had been smoking lay beside him on the turf, and ever and anon there proceeded from him a muffled snore.

Suddenly the stillness was broken. There was a sharp, cracking sound as of splitting wood. The Oldest Member sat up, blinking. As soon as his eyes had become accustomed to the glare, he perceived that a foursome had holed out on the ninth and was disintegrating. Two of the players were moving with quick, purposeful steps in the direction of the side door which gave entrance to the bar; a third was making for the road that led to the village, bearing himself as one in profound dejection; the fourth came on to the terrace.

"Finished?" said the Oldest Member.

The other stopped, wiping a heated brow. He lowered himself into the adjoining chair and stretched his legs out.

"Yes. We started at the tenth. Golly, I'm tired. No joke playing in this weather."

"How did you come out?"

"We won on the last green. Jimmy Fothergill and I were playing the vicar and Rupert Blake."

"What was that sharp, cracking sound I heard?" asked the Oldest Member.

"That was the vicar smashing his putter. Poor old chap, he had rotten luck all the way round, and it didn't seem to make it any better for him that he wasn't able to relieve his feelings in the ordinary way."

"I suspected some such thing," said the Oldest Member,

"from the look of his back as he was leaving the green. His walk was the walk of an overwrought soul."

His companion did not reply. He was breathing deeply and regularly.

"It is a moot question," proceeded the Oldest Member, thoughtfully, "whether the clergy, considering their peculiar position, should not be more liberally handicapped at golf than the laymen with whom they compete. I have made a close study of the game since the days of the feather ball, and I am firmly convinced that to refrain entirely from oaths during a round is almost equivalent to giving away three bisques. There are certain occasions when an oath seems to be so imperatively demanded that the strain of keeping it in must inevitably affect the ganglions or nerve-centres in such a manner as to diminish the steadiness of the swing."

The man beside him slipped lower down in his chair. His mouth had opened slightly.

"I am reminded in this connection," said the Oldest Member, "of the story of young Chester Meredith, a friend of mine whom you have not, I think, met. He moved from this neighbourhood shortly before you came. There was a case where a man's whole happiness was very nearly wrecked purely because he tried to curb his instincts and thwart nature in this very respect. Perhaps you would care to hear the story?"

A snore proceeded from the next chair.

"Very well, then," said the Oldest Member, "I will relate it."

Chester Meredith (said the Oldest Member) was one of the nicest young fellows of my acquaintance. We had been friends ever since he had come to live here as a small boy, and I had watched him with a fatherly eye through all the more important crises of a young man's life. It was I who taught him to drive, and when he had all that trouble in his twenty-first year with shanking his short approaches, it was to me that he came for sympathy and advice. It was an odd coincidence, therefore, that I should have been present when he fell in love.

I was smoking my evening cigar out here and watching the last couples finishing their rounds, when Chester came out of the club-house and sat by me. I could see that the boy was perturbed about something, and wondered why, for I knew that he had won his match.

"What," I inquired, "is on your mind?"

"Oh, nothing," said Chester. "I was only thinking that there are some human misfits who ought not to be allowed on any decent links."

"You mean——?"

"The Wrecking Crew," said Chester, bitterly. "They held us up all the way round, confound them. Wouldn't let us through. What can you do with people who don't know enough of the etiquette of the game to understand that a single has right of way over a four-ball foursome? We had to loaf about for hours on end while they scratched at the turf like a lot of crimson hens. Eventually all four of them lost their balls simultaneously at the eleventh and we managed to get by. I hope they choke."

I was not altogether surprised at his warmth. The Wrecking Crew consisted of four retired business men who had taken up the noble game late in life because their doctors had ordered them air and exercise. Every club, I suppose, has a cross of this kind to bear, and it was not often that our members rebelled; but there was undoubtedly something particularly irritating in the methods of the Wrecking Crew. They tried so hard that it seemed almost inconceivable that they should be so slow.

"They are all respectable men," I said, "and were, I believe, highly thought of in their respective businesses. But on the links I admit that they are a trial."

"They are the direct lineal descendants of the Gadarene swine," said Chester firmly. "Every time they come out I expect to see them rush down the hill from the first tee and hurl themselves into the lake at the second. Of all the——"

"Hush!" I said.

Out of the corner of my eye I had seen a girl approaching, and I was afraid lest Chester in his annoyance might use strong language. For he was one of those golfers who are apt to express themselves in moments of emotion with a good deal of generous warmth.

"Eh?" said Chester.

I jerked my head, and he looked round. And, as he did so, there came into his face an expression which I had seen there only once before, on the occasion when he won the President's Cup on the last green by holing a thirty-yard chip with his mashie. It was a look of ecstasy and awe. His mouth was

open, his eyebrows raised, and he was breathing heavily through his nose.

"Golly!" I heard him mutter.

The girl passed by. I could not blame Chester for staring at her. She was a beautiful young thing, with a lissom figure and a perfect face. Her hair was a deep chestnut, her eyes blue, her nose small and laid back with about as much loft as a light iron. She disappeared, and Chester, after nearly dislocating his neck trying to see her round the corner of the club-house, emitted a deep, explosive sigh.

"Who is she?" he whispered.

I could tell him that. In one way and another I get to know most things around this locality.

"She is a Miss Blakeney. Felicia Blakeney. She has come to stay for a month with the Waterfields. I understand she was at school with Jane Waterfield. She is twenty-three, has a dog named Joseph, dances well, and dislikes parsnips. Her father is a distinguished writer on sociological subjects; her mother is Wilmot Royce, the well-known novelist, whose last work, *Sewers of the Soul*, was, you may recall, jerked before a tribunal by the Purity League. She has a brother, Crispin Blakeney, an eminent young reviewer and essayist, who is now in India studying local conditions with a view to a series of lectures. She only arrived here yesterday, so this is all I have been able to find out about her as yet."

Chester's mouth was still open when I began speaking. By the time I had finished it was open still wider. The ecstatic look in his eyes had changed to one of dull despair.

"My God!" he muttered. "If her family is like that, what chance is there for a rough-neck like me?"

"You admire her?"

"She is the alligator's Adam's apple," said Chester, simply.

I patted his shoulder.

"Have courage, my boy," I said. "Always remember that the love of a good man to whom the pro. can give only a couple of strokes in eighteen holes is not to be despised."

"Yes, that's all very well. But this girl is probably one solid mass of brain. She will look on me as an uneducated wart-hog."

"Well, I will introduce you, and we will see. She looked a nice girl."

"You're a great describer, aren't you?" said Chester. "A wonderful flow of language you've got, I don't think! Nice girl! Why, she's the only girl in the world. She's a pearl among women. She's the most marvellous, astounding, beautiful, heavenly thing that ever drew perfumed breath." He paused, as if his train of thought had been interrupted by an idea. "Did you say that her brother's name was Crispin?"

"I did. Why?"

Chester gave vent to a few manly oaths.

"Doesn't that just show you how things go in this rotten world?"

"What do you mean?"

"I was at school with him."

"Surely that should form a solid basis for friendship?"

"Should it? Should it, by gad? Well, let me tell you that I probably kicked that blighted worm Crispin Blakeney a matter of seven hundred and forty-six times in the few years I knew him. He was the world's worst. He could have walked straight into the Wrecking Crew and no questions asked. Wouldn't it jar you? I have the luck to know her brother, and it turns out that we couldn't stand the sight of each other."

"Well, there is no need to tell her that."

"Do you mean——?" He gazed at me wildly. "Do you mean I might pretend we were pals?"

"Why not? Seeing that he is in India, he can hardly contradict you."

"My gosh!" He mused for a moment. I could see that the idea was beginning to sink in. It was always thus with Chester. You had to give him time. "By Jove, it mightn't be a bad scheme at that. I mean, it would start me off with a rush, like being one up on bogey in the first two. And there's nothing like a good start. By gad, I'll do it."

"I should."

"Reminiscences of the dear old days when we were lads together, and all that sort of thing."

"Precisely."

"It isn't going to be easy, mind you," said Chester, meditatively. "I'll do it because I love her, but nothing else in this world would make me say a civil word about the blister. Well, then, that's settled. Get on with the introduction stuff, will you? I'm in a hurry."

One of the privileges of age is that it enables a man to thrust his society on a beautiful girl without causing her to draw herself up and say "Sir!" It was not difficult for me to make the acquaintance of Miss Blakeney, and, this done, my first act was to unleash Chester on her.

"Chester," I said, summoning him as he loafed with an overdone carelessness on the horizon, one leg almost inextricably entwined about the other, "I want you to meet Miss Blakeney. Miss Blakeney, this is my young friend Chester Meredith. He was at school with your brother Crispin. You were great friends, were you not?"

"Bosom," said Chester, after a pause.

"Oh, really?" said the girl. There was a pause. "He is in India now."

"Yes," said Chester.

There was another pause.

"Great chap," said Chester, gruffly.

"Crispin is very popular," said the girl, "with some people."

"Always been my best pal," said Chester.

"Yes?"

I was not altogether satisfied with the way matters were developing. The girl seemed cold and unfriendly, and I was afraid that this was due to Chester's repellent manner. Shyness, especially when complicated by love at first sight, is apt to have strange effects on a man, and the way it had taken Chester was to make him abnormally stiff and dignified. One of the most charming things about him, as a rule, was his delightful boyish smile. Shyness had caused him to iron this out of his countenance till no trace of it remained. Not only did he not smile, he looked like a man who never had smiled and never would. His mouth was a thin, rigid line. His back was stiff with what appeared to be contemptuous aversion. He looked down his nose at Miss Blakeney as if she were less than the dust beneath his chariot-wheels.

I thought the best thing to do was to leave them alone together to get acquainted. Perhaps, I thought, it was my presence that was cramping Chester's style. I excused myself and receded.

It was some days before I saw Chester again. He came round to my cottage one night after dinner and sank into a chair, where he remained silent for several minutes.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Well?" I said at last.

"Eh?" said Chester, starting violently.

"Have you been seeing anything of Miss Blakeney lately?"

"You bet I have."

"And how do you feel about her on further acquaintance?"

"Eh?" said Chester, absently.

"Do you still love her?"

Chester came out of his trance.

"Love her?" he cried, his voice vibrating with emotion.

"Of course I love her. Who wouldn't love her? I'd be a silly chump not loving her. Do you know," the boy went on, a look in his eyes like that of some young knight seeing the Holy Grail in a vision, "do you know, she is the only woman I ever met who didn't overswing. Just a nice, crisp, snappy half-slosh, with a good full follow-through. And another thing. You'll hardly believe me, but she waggles almost as little as George Duncan. You know how women waggle as a rule, fiddling about for a minute and a half like kittens playing with a ball of wool. Well, she just makes one firm pass with the club and then *bing!* There is none like her, none."

"Then you have been playing golf with her?"

"Nearly every day."

"How is your game?"

"Rather spotty. I seem to be mistiming them."

I was concerned.

"I do hope, my dear boy," I said, earnestly, "that you are taking care to control your feelings when out on the links with Miss Blakeney. You know what you are like. I trust you have not been using the sort of language you generally employ on occasions when you are not timing them right?"

"Me?" said Chester, horrified. "Who, me? You don't imagine for a moment that I would dream of saying a thing that would bring a blush to her dear cheek, do you? Why, a bishop could have gone round with me and learned nothing new."

I was relieved.

"How do you find you manage the dialogue these days?" I asked. "When I introduced you, you behaved—you will forgive an old friend for criticizing—you behaved a little like a stuffed frog with laryngitis. Have things got easier in that respect?"

"Oh yes. I'm quite the prattler now. I talk about her

brother mostly. I put in the greater part of my time boosting the tick. It seems to be coming easier. Will-power, I suppose. And then, of course, I talk a good deal about her mother's novels."

"Have you read them?"

"Every damned one of them—for her sake. And if there's a greater proof of love than that, show me! My gosh, what muck that woman writes! That reminds me, I've got to send to the bookshop for her latest—out yesterday. It's called *The Stench of Life*. A sequel, I understand, to *Grey Mildew*.

"Brave lad," I said, pressing his hand. "Brave, devoted lad!"

"Oh, I'd do more than that for her." He smoked for a while in silence. "By the way, I'm going to propose to her tomorrow."

"Already?"

"Can't put it off a minute longer. It's been as much as I could manage, bottling it up till now. Where do you think would be the best place? I mean, it's not the sort of thing you can do while you're walking down the street or having a cup of tea. I thought of asking her to have a round with me and taking a stab at it on the links."

"You could not do better. The links—Nature's cathedral."

"Right-o, then! I'll let you know how I come out."

"I wish you luck, my boy," I said.

And what of Felicia, meanwhile? She was, alas, far from returning the devotion which scorched Chester's vital organs. He seemed to her precisely the sort of man she most disliked. From childhood up Felicia Blakeney had lived in an atmosphere of highbrowism, and the type of husband she had always seen in her daydreams was the man who was simple and straightforward and earthy and did not know whether Artbashieff was a suburb of Moscow or a new kind of Russian drink. A man like Chester, who on his own statement would rather read one of her mother's novels than eat, revolted her. And his warm affection for her brother Crispin set the seal on her distaste.

Felicia was a dutiful child, and she loved her parents. It took a bit of doing, but she did it. But at her brother Crispin she drew the line. He wouldn't do, and his friends were worse than he was. They were high-voiced, supercilious, pince-

nezed young men who talked patronizingly of Life and Art, and Chester's unblushing confession that he was one of them had put him ten down and nine to play right away.

You may wonder why the boy's undeniable skill on the links had no power to soften the girl. The unfortunate fact was that all the good effects of his prowess were neutralized by his behaviour while playing. All her life she had treated golf with a proper reverence and awe, and in Chester's attitude towards the game she seemed to detect a horrible shallowness. The fact is, Chester, in his efforts to keep himself from using strong language, had found a sort of relief in a girlish giggle, and it made her shudder every time she heard it.

His deportment, therefore, in the space of time leading up to the proposal could not have been more injurious to his cause. They started out quite happily, Chester doing a nice two-hundred-yarder off the first tee, which for a moment awoke the girl's respect. But at the fourth, after a lovely brassie-shot, he found his ball deeply embedded in the print of a woman's high heel. It was just one of those rubs of the green which normally would have caused him to ease his bosom with a flood of sturdy protest, but now he was on his guard.

"Tee-hee!" simpered Chester, reaching for his niblick. "Too bad, too bad!" and the girl shuddered to the depths of her soul.

Having holed out, he proceeded to enliven the walk to the next tee with a few remarks on her mother's literary style, and it was while they were walking after their drives that he proposed.

His proposal, considering the circumstances, could hardly have been less happily worded. Little knowing that he was rushing upon his doom, Chester stressed the Crispin note. He gave Felicia the impression that he was suggesting this marriage more for Crispin's sake than anything else. He conveyed the idea that he thought how nice it would be for brother Crispin to have his old chum in the family. He drew a picture of their little home, with Crispin for ever popping in and out like a rabbit. It is not to be wondered at that, when at length he had finished and she had time to speak, the horrified girl turned him down with a thud.

It is at moments such as these that a man reaps the reward of a good upbringing.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

In similar circumstances those who have not had the benefit of a sound training in golf are too apt to go wrong. Goaded by the sudden anguish, they take to drink, plunge into dissipation, and write *vers libre*. Chester was mercifully saved from this. I saw him the day after he had been handed the mitten, and was struck by the look of grim determination in his face. Deeply wounded though he was, I could see that he was the master of his fate and the captain of his soul.

"I am sorry, my boy," I said, sympathetically, when he had told me the painful news.

"It can't be helped," he replied, bravely.

"Her decision was final?"

"Quite."

"You do not contemplate having another pop at her?"

"No good. I know when I'm licked."

I patted him on the shoulder and said the only thing it seemed possible to say.

"After all, there is always golf."

He nodded.

"Yes. My game needs a lot of tuning up. Now is the time to do it. From now on I go at this pastime seriously. I make it my life-work. Who knows?" he murmured, with a sudden gleam in his eyes. "The Amateur Championship——"

"The Open!" I cried, falling gladly into his mood.

"The American Amateur," said Chester, flushing.

"The American Open," I chorused.

"No one has ever copped all four."

"No one."

"Watch me!" said Chester Meredith, simply.

It was about two weeks after this that I happened to look in on Chester at his house one morning. I found him about to start for the links. As he had foreshadowed in the conversation which I have just related, he now spent most of the daylight hours on the course. In these two weeks he had gone about his task of achieving perfection with a furious energy which made him the talk of the club. Always one of the best players in the place, he had developed an astounding brilliance. Men who had played him level were now obliged to receive two and even three strokes. The pro. himself, conceding one, had only succeeded in halving their match. The struggle for the President's Cup

THE HEART OF A GOOF

came round once more, and Chester won it for the second time with ridiculous ease.

When I arrived, he was practising chip-shots in his sitting-room. I noticed that he seemed to be labouring under some strong emotion, and his first words gave me the clue.

"She's going away tomorrow," he said, abruptly, lofting a ball over the whatnot on to the Chesterfield.

I was not sure whether I was sorry or relieved. Her absence would leave a terrible blank, of course, but it might be that it would help him to get over his infatuation.

"Ah!" I said, non-committally.

Chester addressed his ball with a well-assumed phlegm, but I could see by the way his ears wiggled that he was feeling deeply. I was not surprised when he topped his shot into the coal-scuttle.

"She has promised to play a last round with me this morning," he said.

Again I was doubtful what view to take. It was a pretty, poetic idea, not unlike Browning's "Last Ride Together", but I was not sure if it was altogether wise. However, it was none of my business, so I merely patted him on the shoulder and he gathered up his clubs and went off.

Owing to motives of delicacy I had not offered to accompany him on his round, and it was not till later that I learned the actual details of what occurred. At the start, it seems, the spiritual anguish which he was suffering had a depressing effect on his game. He hooked his drive off the first tee and was only enabled to get a five by means of a strong niblick shot out of the rough. At the second, the lake hole, he lost a ball in the water and got another five. It was only at the third that he began to pull himself together.

The test of a great golfer is his ability to recover from a bad start. Chester had this quality to a pre-eminent degree. A lesser man, conscious of being three over bogey for the first two holes, might have looked on his round as ruined. To Chester it simply meant that he had to get a couple of "birdies" right speedily, and he set about it at once. Always a long driver, he excelled himself at the third. It is, as you know, an uphill hole all the way, but his drive could not have come far short of two hundred and fifty yards. A brassie-shot of equal strength

THE HEART OF A GOOF

and unerring direction put him on the edge of the green, and he holed out with a long putt two under bogey. He had hoped for a "birdie" and he had achieved an "eagle".

I think that this splendid feat must have softened Felicia's heart, had it not been for the fact that misery had by this time entirely robbed Chester of the ability to smile. Instead, therefore, of behaving in the wholesome, natural way of men who get threes at bogey-five holes, he preserved a drawn, impassive countenance; and as she watched him tee up her ball, stiff, correct, polite, but to all outward appearance absolutely inhuman, the girl found herself stifling that thrill of what for a moment had been almost adoration. It was, she felt, exactly how her brother Crispin would have comported himself if he had done a hole in two under bogey.

And yet she could not altogether check a wistful sigh when, after a couple of fours at the next two holes, he picked up another stroke on the sixth and with an inspired spoon-shot brought his medal-score down to one better than bogey by getting a two at the hundred-and-seventy-yard seventh. But the brief spasm of tenderness passed, and when he finished the first nine with two more fours she refrained from anything warmer than a mere word of stereotyped congratulation.

"One under bogey for the first nine," she said. "Splendid!"

"One under bogey!" said Chester, woodenly.

"Out in thirty-four. What is the record for the course?"

Chester started. So great had been his preoccupation that he had not given a thought to the course record. He suddenly realized now that the pro., who had done the lowest medal-score to date—the other course record was held by Peter Willard with a hundred and sixty-one, achieved in his first season—had gone out in only one better than his own figures that day.

"Sixty-eight," he said.

"What a pity you lost those strokes at the beginning!"

"Yes," said Chester.

He spoke absently—and, as it seemed to her, primly and without enthusiasm—for the flaming idea of having a go at the course record had only just occurred to him. Once before he had done the first nine in thirty-four, but on that occasion he had not felt that curious feeling of irresistible force which comes to a golfer at the very top of his form. Then he had been aware all the time that he had been putting chancily. They had gone

THE HEART OF A GOOF

in, yes, but he had uttered a prayer per putt. Today he was superior to any weak doubtings. When he tapped the ball on the green, he knew it was going to sink. The course record? Why not? What a last offering to lay at her feet! She would go away, out of his life for ever; she would marry some other bird; but the memory of that supreme round would remain with her as long as she breathed. When he won the Open and Amateur for the second—the third—the fourth time, she would say to herself, "I was with him when he dented the record for his home course!" And he had only to pick up a couple of strokes on the last nine, to do threes at holes where he was wont to be satisfied with fours. Yes, by Vardon, he would take a whirl at it.

You, who are acquainted with these links, will no doubt say that the task which Chester Meredith had sketched out for himself—cutting two strokes off thirty-five for the second nine—was one at which Humanity might well shudder. The pro. himself, who had finished sixth in the last Open Championship, had never done better than a thirty-five, playing perfect golf and being one under par. But such was Chester's mood that, as he teed up on the tenth, he did not even consider the possibility of failure. Every muscle in his body was working in perfect co-ordination with its fellows, his wrists felt as if they were made of tempered steel, and his eyes had just that hawk-like quality which enables a man to judge his short approaches to the inch. He swung forcefully, and the ball sailed so close to the direction-post that for a moment it seemed as if it had hit it.

"Oo!" cried Felicia.

Chester did not speak. He was following the flight of the ball. It sailed over the brow of the hill, and with his knowledge of the course he could tell almost the exact patch of turf on which it must have come to rest. An iron would do the business from there, and a single putt would give him the first of the "birdies" he required. Two minutes later he had holed out a six-foot putt for a three.

"Oo!" said Felicia again.

Chester walked to the eleventh tee in silence.

"No, never mind," she said, as he stooped to put her ball on the sand. "I don't think I'll play any more. I'd much rather just watch you."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Oh, that you could watch me through life!" said Chester, but he said it to himself. His actual words were "Very well!" and he spoke them with a stiff coldness which chilled the girl.

The eleventh is one of the trickiest holes on the course, as no doubt you have found out for yourself. It looks absurdly simple, but that little patch of wood on the right that seems so harmless is placed just in the deadliest position to catch even the most slightly sliced drive. Chester's lacked the austere precision of his last. A hundred yards from the tee it swerved almost imperceptibly, and, striking a branch, fell in the tangled undergrowth. It took him two strokes to hack it out and put it on the green, and then his long putt, after quivering on the edge of the hole, stayed there. For a swift instant red-hot words rose to his lips, but he caught them just as they were coming out and crushed them back. He looked at his ball and looked at the hole.

"Tut!" said Chester.

Felicia uttered a deep sigh. The niblick-shot out of the rough had impressed her profoundly. If only, she felt, this superb golfer had been more human! If only she were able to be constantly in this man's society, to see exactly what it was that he did with his left wrist that gave that terrific snap to his drives, she might acquire the knack herself one of these days. For she was a clear-thinking, honest girl, and thoroughly realized that she did not get the distance she ought to with her wood. With a husband like Chester beside her to stimulate and advise, of what might she not be capable? If she got wrong in her stance, he could put her right with a word. If she had a bout of slicing, how quickly he would tell her what caused it. And she knew that she had only to speak the word to wipe out the effects of her refusal, to bring him to her side for ever.

But could a girl pay such a price? When he had got that "eagle" on the third, he had looked bored. When he had missed this last putt, he had not seemed to care. "Tut!" What a word to use at such a moment! No, she felt sadly, it could not be done. To marry Chester Meredith, she told herself, would be like marrying a composite of Soames Forsyte, Sir Willoughby Patterne, and all her brother Crispin's friends. She sighed and was silent.

Chester, standing on the twelfth tee, reviewed the situation

THE HEART OF A GOOF

swiftly, like a general before a battle. There were seven holes to play, and he had to do these in two better than bogey. The one that faced him now offered few opportunities. It was a long, slogging, dog-leg hole, and even Ray and Taylor, when they had played their exhibition game on the course, had taken fives. No opening there.

The thirteenth—up a steep hill with a long iron-shot for one's second and a blind green fringed with bunkers? Scarcely practicable to hope for better than a four. The fourteenth—into the valley with the ground sloping sharply down to the ravine? He had once done it in three, but it had been a fluke. No; on these three holes he must be content to play for a steady par and trust to picking up a stroke on the fifteenth.

The fifteenth, straightforward up to the plateau green with its circle of bunkers, presents few difficulties to the finished golfer who is on his game. A bunker meant nothing to Chester in his present conquering vein. His mashie-shot second soared almost contemptuously over the chasm and rolled to within a foot of the pin. He came to the sixteenth with the clear-cut problem before him of snipping two strokes off par on the last three holes.

To the unthinking man, not acquainted with the lay-out of our links, this would no doubt appear a tremendous feat. But the fact is, the Green Committee, with perhaps an unduly sentimental bias towards the happy ending, have arranged a comparatively easy finish to the course. The sixteenth is a perfectly plain hole with broad fairway and a down-hill run; the seventeenth, a one-shot affair with no difficulties for the man who keeps them straight; and the eighteenth, though its up-hill run makes it deceptive to the stranger and leads the unwary to take a mashie instead of a light iron for his second, has no real venom in it. Even Peter Willard has occasionally come home in a canter with a six, five, and seven, conceding himself only two eight-foot putts. It is, I think, this mild conclusion to a tough course that makes the refreshment-room of our club so noticeable for its sea of happy faces. The bar every day is crowded with rejoicing men who, forgetting the agonies of the first fifteen, are babbling of what they did on the last three. The seventeenth, with its possibilities of holing out a topped second, is particularly soothing.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Chester Meredith was not the man to top his second on any hole, so this supreme bliss did not come his way; but he laid a beautiful mashie-shot dead and got a three; and when with his iron he put his first well on the green at the seventeenth and holed out for a two, life, for all his broken heart, seemed pretty tolerable. He now had the situation well in hand. He had only to play his usual game to get a four on the last and lower the course record by one stroke.

It was at this supreme moment of his life that he ran into the Wrecking Crew.

You doubtless find it difficult to understand how it came about that if the Wrecking Crew were on the course at all he had not run into them long before. The explanation is that, with a regard for the etiquette of the game unusual in these miserable men, they had for once obeyed the law that enacts that four-somes shall start at the tenth. They had begun their dark work on the second nine, accordingly, at almost the exact moment when Chester Meredith was driving off at the first, and this had enabled them to keep ahead until now. When Chester came to the eighteenth tee, they were just leaving it, moving up the fair-way with their caddies in mass formation and looking to his exasperated eye like one of those great race-migrations of the Middle Ages. Wherever Chester looked he seemed to see human, so to speak, figures. One was doddering about in the long grass fifty yards from the tee, others debouched to left and right. The course was crawling with them.

Chester sat down on the bench with a weary sigh. He knew these men. Self-centred, remorseless, deaf to all the promptings of their better nature, they never let anyone through. There was nothing to do but wait.

The Wrecking Crew scratched on. The man near the tee rolled his ball ten yards, then twenty, then thirty—he was improving. Ere long he would be out of range. Chester rose and swished his driver.

But the end was not yet. The individual operating in the rough on the left had been advancing in slow stages, and now, finding his ball teed up on a tuft of grass, he opened his shoulders and let himself go. There was a loud report, and the ball, hitting a tree squarely, bounded back almost to the tee, and all the weary work was to do again. By the time Chester was able to drive, he was reduced by impatience, and the necessity of

THE HEART OF A GOOF

refraining from commenting on the state of affairs as he would have wished to comment, to a frame of mind in which no man could have kept himself from pressing. He pressed, and topped. The ball skidded over the turf for a meagre hundred yards.

"D-d-d-dear me!" said Chester.

The next moment he uttered a bitter laugh. Too late a miracle had happened. One of the foul figures in front was waving its club. Other ghastly creatures were withdrawing to the side of the fairway. Now, when the harm had been done, these outcasts were signalling to him to go through. The hollow mockery of the thing swept over Chester like a wave. What was the use of going through now? He was a good three hundred yards from the green, and he needed a bogey at this hole to break the record. Almost absently he drew his brassie from his bag; then, as the full sense of his wrongs bit into his soul, he swung viciously.

Golf is a strange game. Chester had pressed on the tee and foozled. He pressed now, and achieved the most perfect shot of his life. The ball shot from its place as if a charge of powerful explosive were behind it. Never deviating from a straight line, never more than six feet from the ground, it sailed up the hill, crossed the bunker, eluded the mounds beyond, struck the turf, rolled, and stopped fifty feet from the hole. It was a brassie-shot of a lifetime, and shrill senile yippings of excitement and congratulation floated down from the Wrecking Crew. For, degraded though they were, these men were not wholly devoid of human instincts.

Chester drew a deep breath. His ordeal was over. That third shot, which would lay the ball right up to the pin, was precisely the sort of thing he did best. Almost from boyhood he had been a wizard at the short approach. He could hole out in two now on his left ear. He strode up the hill to his ball. It could not have been lying better. Two inches away there was a nasty cup in the turf; but it had avoided this and was sitting nicely perched up, smiling an invitation to the mashie-niblick. Chester shuffled his feet and eyed the flag keenly. Then he stooped to play, and Felicia watched him breathlessly. Her whole body seemed to be concentrated on him. She had forgotten everything save that she was seeing a course record get broken. She could not have been more wrapped up in his success if she had had large sums of money on it.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

The Wrecking Crew, meanwhile, had come to life again. They had stopped twittering about Chester's brassie-shot and were thinking of resuming their own game. Even in foursomes where fifty yards is reckoned a good shot somebody must be away, and the man whose turn it was to play was the one who had acquired from his brother-members of the club the nickname of the First Grave-Digger.

A word about this human wen. He was—if there can be said to be grades in such a sub-species—the star performer of the Wrecking Crew. The lunches of fifty-seven years had caused his chest to slip down into the mezzanine floor, but he was still a powerful man, and had in his youth been a hammer-thrower of some repute. He differed from his colleagues—the Man With the Hoe, Old Father Time, and Consul, the Almost Human—in that, while they were content to peck cautiously at the ball, he never spared himself in his efforts to do it a violent injury. Frequently he had cut a blue dot almost in half with his niblick. He was completely muscle-bound, so that he seldom achieved anything beyond a series of chasms in the turf, but he was always trying, and it was his secret belief that, given two or three miracles happening simultaneously, he would one of these days bring off a snifter. Years of disappointment had, however, reduced the flood of hope to a mere trickle, and when he took his brassie now and addressed the ball he had no immediate plans beyond a vague intention of rolling the thing a few yards farther up the hill.

The fact that he had no business to play at all till Chester had holed out did not occur to him; and even if it had occurred he would have dismissed the objection as finicking. Chester, bending over his ball, was nearly two hundred yards away—or the distance of three full brassie-shots. The First Grave-Digger did not hesitate. He whirled up his club as in distant days he had been wont to swing the hammer, and, with the grunt which this performance always wrung from him, brought it down.

Golfers—and I stretch this term to include the Wrecking Crew—are a highly imitative race. The spectacle of a flubber flubbing ahead of us on the fairway inclines to make us flub as well; and, conversely, it is immediately after we have seen a magnificent shot that we are apt to eclipse ourselves. Consciously the Grave-Digger had no notion how Chester had made that superb brassie-biff of his, but all the while I suppose his

subconscious self had been taking notes. At any rate, on this occasion he, too, did the shot of a lifetime. As he opened his eyes, which he always shut tightly at the moment of impact, and started to unravel himself from the complicated tangle in which his follow-through had left him, he perceived the ball breasting the hill like some untamed jack-rabbit of the Californian prairie.

For a moment his only emotion was one of dreamlike amazement. He stood looking at the ball with a wholly impersonal wonder, like a man suddenly confronted with some terrific work of Nature. Then, as a sleep-walker awakens, he came to himself with a start. Directly in front of the flying ball was a man bending to make an approach-shot.

Chester, always a concentrated golfer when there was man's work to do, had scarcely heard the crack of the brassie behind him. Certainly he had paid no attention to it. His whole mind was fixed on his stroke. He measured with his eye the distance to the pin, noted the down-slope of the green, and shifted his stance a little to allow for it. Then, with a final swift waggle, he laid his club-head behind the ball and slowly raised it. It was just coming down when the world became full of shouts of "Fore!" and something hard smote him violently on the seat of his plus fours.

The supreme tragedies of life leave us momentarily stunned. For an instant which seemed an age Chester could not understand what had happened. True, he realized that there had been an earthquake, a cloud-burst, and a railway accident, and that a high building had fallen on him at the exact moment when somebody had shot him with a gun, but these happenings would account for only a small part of his sensations. He blinked several times, and rolled his eyes wildly. And it was while rolling them that he caught sight of the gesticulating Wrecking Crew on the lower slopes and found enlightenment. Simultaneously, he observed his ball only a yard and a half from where it had been when he addressed it.

Chester Meredith gave one look at his ball, one look at the flag, one look at the Wrecking Crew, one look at the sky. His lips writhed, his forehead turned vermillion. Beads of perspiration started out on his forehead. And then, with his whole soul seething like a cistern struck by a thunderbolt, he spoke.

"!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" cried Chester.

Dimly he was aware of a wordless exclamation from the girl

beside him, but he was too distraught to think of her now. It was as if all the oaths pent up within his bosom for so many weary days were struggling and jostling to see which could get out first. They cannoned into each other, they linked hands and formed parties, they got themselves all mixed up in weird vowel-sounds, the second syllable of some red-hot verb forming a temporary union with the first syllable of some blistering noun.

"——! ——!! ——!!! ——!!!! ——!!!!!" cried Chester.

Felicia stood staring at him. In her eyes was the look of one who sees visions.

"***!!! ***!!! ***!!! ***!!!" roared Chester, in part.

A great wave of emotion flooded over the girl. How she had misjudged this silver-tongued man! She shivered as she thought that, had this not happened, in another five minutes they would have parted for ever, sundered by seas of misunderstanding, she cold and scornful, he with all his music still within him.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith!" she cried, faintly.

With a sickening abruptness Chester came to himself. It was as if somebody had poured a pint of ice-cold water down his back. He blushed vividly. He realized with horror and shame how grossly he had offended against all the canons of decency and good taste. He felt like the man in one of those "What Is Wrong With This Picture?" things in the advertisements of the etiquette books.

"I beg—I beg your pardon!" he mumbled, humbly. "Please, please, forgive me. I should not have spoken like that."

"You should! You should!" cried the girl, passionately. "You should have said all that and a lot more. That awful man ruining your record round like that! Oh, why am I a poor weak woman with practically no vocabulary that's any use for anything!"

Quite suddenly, without knowing that she had moved, she found herself at his side, holding his hand.

"Oh, to think how I misjudged you!" she wailed. "I thought you cold, stiff, formal, precise. I hated the way you sniggered when you fozzled a shot. I see it all now! You were keeping it in for my sake. Can you ever forgive me?"

Chester, as I have said, was not a very quick-minded young man, but it would have taken a duller youth than he to fail to read the message in the girl's eyes, to miss the meaning of the pressure of her hand on his.

"My gosh!" he exclaimed wildly. "Do you mean——? Do you think——? Do you really——? Honestly, has this made a difference? Is there any chance for a fellow, I mean?"

Her eyes helped him on. He felt suddenly confident and masterful.

"Look here—no kidding—will you marry me?" he said.

"I will! I will!"

"Darling!" cried Chester.

He would have said more, but at this point he was interrupted by the arrival of the Wrecking Crew who panted up full of apologies; and Chester, as he eyed them, thought that he had never seen a nicer, cheerier, pleasanter lot of fellows in his life. His heart warmed to them. He made a mental resolve to hunt them up some time and have a good long talk. He waved the Grave-Digger's remorse airily aside.

"Don't mention it," he said. "Not at all. Faults on both sides. By the way, my *fiancée*, Miss Blakeney."

The Wrecking Crew puffed acknowledgment.

"But, my dear fellow," said the Grave-Digger, "it was—really it was—unforgivable. Spoiling your shot. Never dreamed I would send the ball that distance. Lucky you weren't playing an important match."

"But he was," moaned Felicia. "He was trying for the course record, and now he can't break it."

The Wrecking Crew paled behind their whiskers, aghast at this tragedy, but Chester, glowing with the yeasty intoxication of love, laughed lightly.

"What do you mean, can't break it?" he cried, cheerily. "I've one more shot."

And, carelessly addressing the ball, he holed out with a light flick of his mashie-niblick.

"Chester, darling!" said Felicia.

They were walking slowly through a secluded glade in the quiet evenfall.

"Yes, precious?"

Felicia hesitated. What she was going to say would hurt him, she knew, and her love was so great that to hurt him was agony.

"Do you think——" she began. "I wonder whether—— It's about Crispin."

"Good old Crispin!"

Felicia sighed, but the matter was too vital to be shirked. Cost what it might, she must speak her mind.

"Chester, darling, when we are married, would you mind very, *very* much if we didn't have Crispin with us *all* the time?"

Chester started.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Don't you like him?"

"Not very much," confessed Felicia. "I don't think I'm clever enough for him. I've rather disliked him ever since we were children. But I know what a friend he is of yours——"

Chester uttered a joyous laugh.

"Friend of mine! Why, I can't stand the blighter! I loathe the worm! I abominate the excrescence! I only pretended we were friends because I thought it would put me in solid with you. The man is a pest and should have been strangled at birth. At school I used to kick him every time I saw him. If your brother Crispin tries so much as to set foot across the threshold of our little home, I'll set the dog on him."

"Darling!" whispered Felicia. "We shall be very, very happy." She drew her arm through his. "Tell me, dearest," she murmured, "all about how you used to kick Crispin at school."

And together they wandered off into the sunset.

CHAPTER V

THE MAGIC PLUS FOURS

"AFTER all," said the young man, "golf is only a game." He spoke bitterly and with the air of one who has been following a train of thought. He had come into the smoking-room of the club-house in low spirits at the dusky close of a November evening, and for some minutes had been sitting, silent and moody, staring at the log fire.

"Merely a pastime," said the young man.

The Oldest Member, nodding in his arm-chair, stiffened with horror, and glanced quickly over his shoulder to make sure that none of the waiters had heard these terrible words.

"Can this be George William Pennefather speaking!" he said, reproachfully. "My boy, you are not yourself."

The young man flushed a little beneath his tan: for he had had a good upbringing and was not bad at heart.

"Perhaps I ought not to have gone quite so far as that," he admitted. "I was only thinking that a fellow's got no right, just because he happens to have come on a bit in his form lately, to treat a fellow as if a fellow was a leper or something."

The Oldest Member's face cleared, and he breathed a relieved sigh.

"Ah! I see," he said. "You spoke hastily and in a sudden fit of pique because something upset you out on the links today. Tell me all. Let me see, you were playing with Nathaniel Frisby this afternoon, were you not? I gather that he beat you."

"Yes, he did. Giving me a third. But it isn't being beaten that I mind. What I object to is having the blighter behave as if he were a sort of champion condescending to a mere mortal. Dash it, it seemed to bore him playing with me! Every time I sliced off the tee he looked at me as if I were a painful ordeal. Twice when I was having a bit of trouble in the bushes I caught him yawning. And after we had finished he started talking about

what a good game croquet was, and he wondered more people didn't take it up. And it's only a month or so ago that I could play the man level!"

The Oldest Member shook his snowy head sadly.

"There is nothing to be done about it," he said. "We can only hope that the poison will in time work its way out of the man's system. Sudden success at golf is like the sudden acquisition of wealth. It is apt to unsettle and deteriorate the character. And, as it comes almost miraculously, so only a miracle can effect a cure. The best advice I can give you is to refrain from playing with Nathaniel Frisby till you can keep your tee-shots straight."

"Oh, but don't run away with the idea that I wasn't pretty good off the tee this afternoon!" said the young man. "I should like to describe to you the shot I did on the——"

"Meanwhile," proceeded the Oldest Member, "I will relate to you a little story which bears on what I have been saying."

"From the very moment I addressed the ball——"

"It is the story of two loving hearts temporarily estranged owing to the sudden and unforeseen proficiency of one of the couple——"

"I wagged quickly and strongly, like Duncan. Then, swinging smoothly back, rather in the Vardon manner——"

"But as I see," said the Oldest Member, "that you are all impatience for me to begin, I will do so without further preamble."

To the philosophical student of golf like myself (said the Oldest Member) perhaps the most outstanding virtue of this noble pursuit is the fact that it is a medicine for the soul. Its great service to humanity is that it teaches human beings that, whatever petty triumphs they may have achieved in other walks of life, they are after all merely human. It acts as a corrective against sinful pride. I attribute the insane arrogance of the later Roman emperors almost entirely to the fact that, never having played golf, they never knew that strange chastening humility which is engendered by a topped chip-shot. If Cleopatra had been outed in the first round of the Ladies' Singles, we should have heard a lot less of her proud imperiousness. And, coming down to modern times, it was undoubtedly his rotten golf that kept Wallace Chesney the nice unspoiled fellow he was. For in every other respect he had everything in the world calculated to

THE HEART OF A GOOF

make a man conceited and arrogant. He was the best-looking man for miles around; his health was perfect; and, in addition to this, he was rich; danced, rode, played bridge and polo with equal skill; and was engaged to be married to Charlotte Dix. And when you saw Charlotte Dix you realized that being engaged to her would by itself have been quite enough luck for any one man.

But Wallace, as I say, despite all his advantages, was a thoroughly nice, modest young fellow. And I attribute this to the fact that, while one of the keenest golfers in the club, he was also one of the worst players. Indeed, Charlotte Dix used to say to me in his presence that she could not understand why people paid money to go to the circus when by merely walking over the brow of a hill they could watch Wallace Chesney trying to get out of the bunker by the eleventh green. And Wallace took the gibe with perfect good humour, for there was a delightful camaraderie between them which robbed it of any sting. Often at lunch in the club-house I used to hear him and Charlotte planning the handicapping details of a proposed match between Wallace and a non-existent cripple whom Charlotte claimed to have discovered in the village—it being agreed finally that he should accept seven bisques from the cripple, but that, if the latter ever recovered the use of his arms, Wallace should get a stroke a hole.

In short, a thoroughly happy and united young couple. Two hearts, if I may coin an expression, that beat as one.

I would not have you misjudge Wallace Chesney. I may have given you the impression that his attitude towards golf was light and frivolous, but such was not the case. As I have said, he was one of the keenest members of the club. Love made him receive the joshing of his *fiancée* in the kindly spirit in which it was meant, but at heart he was as earnest as you could wish. He practised early and late; he bought golf books; and the mere sight of a patent club of any description acted on him like catnip on a cat. I remember remonstrating with him on the occasion of his purchasing a wooden-faced driving-mashie which weighed about two pounds, and was, taking it for all in all, as foul an instrument as ever came out of the workshop of a clubmaker who had been dropped on the head by his nurse when a baby.

"I know, I know," he said, when I had finished indicating some of the weapon's more obvious defects. "But the point is,

THE HEART OF A GOOF

I believe in it. It gives me confidence. I don't believe you could slice with a thing like that if you tried."

Confidence! That was what Wallace Chesney lacked, and that, as he saw it, was the prime grand secret of golf. Like an alchemist on the track of the Philosopher's Stone, he was for ever seeking for something which would really give him confidence. I recollect that he even tried repeating to himself fifty times every morning the words, "Every day in every way I grow better and better." This, however, proved such a black lie that he gave it up. The fact is, the man was a visionary, and it is to auto-hypnosis of some kind that I attribute the extraordinary change that came over him at the beginning of his third season.

You may have noticed in your perambulations about the City a shop bearing above its door and upon its windows the legend:

COHEN BROS., SECOND-HAND CLOTHIERS,

a statement which is borne out by endless vistas seen through the door of every variety of what is technically known as Gents' Wear. But the Brothers Cohen, though their main stock-in-trade is garments which have been rejected by their owners for one reason or another, do not confine their dealings to Gents' Wear. The place is a museum of derelict goods of every description. You can get a second-hand revolver there, or a second-hand sword, or a second-hand umbrella. You can do a cheap deal in field-glasses, trunks, dog collars, canes, photograph frames, attaché cases, and bowls for goldfish. And on the bright spring morning when Wallace Chesney happened to pass by there was exhibited in the window a putter of such preeminently lunatic design that he stopped dead as if he had run into an invisible wall, and then, panting like an overwrought fish, charged in through the door.

The shop was full of the Cohen family, sombre-eyed, smileless men with purposeful expressions; and two of these, instantly descending upon Wallace Chesney like leopards, began in swift silence to thrust him into a suit of yellow tweed. Having worked the coat over his shoulders with a shoe-horn, they stood back to watch the effect.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"A beautiful fit," announced Isidore Cohen.

"A little snug under the arms," said his brother Irving.

"But that'll give."

"The warmth of the body will make it give," said Isidore.

"Or maybe you'll lose weight in the summer," said Irving.

Wallace, when he had struggled out of the coat and was able to breathe, said that he had come in to buy a putter. Isidore therefore sold him the putter, a dog collar, and a set of studs, and Irving sold him a fireman's helmet: and he was about to leave when their elder brother Lou, who had just finished fitting out another customer, who had come in to buy a cap, with two pairs of trousers and a miniature aquarium for keeping newts in, saw that business was in progress and strolled up. His fathomless eye rested on Wallace, who was toying feebly with the putter.

"You play golf?" asked Lou. "Then looka here!"

He dived into an alleyway of dead clothing, dug for a moment, and emerged with something at the sight of which Wallace Chesney, hardened golfer that he was, blenched and threw up an arm defensively.

"No, no!" he cried.

The object which Lou Cohen was waving insinuatingly before his eyes was a pair of those golfing breeches which are technically known as Plus Fours. A player of two years' standing, Wallace Chesney was not unfamiliar with Plus Fours—all the club cracks wore them—but he had never seen Plus Fours like these. What might be termed the main *motif* of the fabric was a curious vivid pink, and with this to work on the architect had let his imagination run free, and had produced so much variety in the way of chessboard squares of white, yellow, violet, and green that the eye swam as it looked upon them.

"These were made to measure for Sandy McHoots, the Open Champion," said Lou, stroking the left leg lovingly. "But he sent 'em back for some reason or other."

"Perhaps they frightened the children," said Wallace, recollecting having heard that Mr. McHoots was a married man.

"They'll fit you nice," said Lou.

"Sure they'll fit him nice," said Isidore, warmly.

"Why, just take a look at yourself in the glass," said Irving, "and see if they don't fit you nice."

And, as one who wakes from a trance, Wallace discovered that his lower limbs were now encased in the prismatic garment.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

At what point in the proceedings the brethren had slipped them on him, he could not have said. But he was undeniably in.

Wallace looked in the glass. For a moment, as he eyed his reflection, sheer horror gripped him. Then suddenly, as he gazed, he became aware that his first feelings were changing. The initial shock over, he was becoming calmer. He waggled his right leg with a certain sang-froid.

There is a certain passage in the works of the poet Pope with which you may be familiar. It runs as follows:

*"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated needs but to be seen:
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."*

Even so was it with Wallace Chesney and these Plus Fours. At first he had recoiled from them as any decent-minded man would have done. Then, after a while, almost abruptly he found himself in the grip of a new emotion. After an unsuccessful attempt to analyse this, he suddenly got it. Amazing as it may seem, it was pleasure that he felt. He caught his eye in the mirror, and it was smirking. Now that the things were actually on, by Hutchinson, they didn't look half bad. By Braid, they didn't. There was a sort of something about them. Take away that expanse of bare leg with its unsightly sock-suspender and substitute a woolly stocking, and you would have the lower section of a golfer. For the first time in his life, he thought, he looked like a man who could play golf.

There came to him an odd sensation of masterfulness. He was still holding the putter, and now he swung it up above his shoulder. A fine swing, all lissomness and supple grace, quite different from any swing he had ever done before.

Wallace Chesney gasped. He knew that at last he had discovered that prime grand secret of golf for which he had searched so long. It was the costume that did it. All you had to do was wear Plus Fours. He had always hitherto played in grey flannel trousers. Naturally he had not been able to do himself justice. Golf required an easy dash, and how could you be easily dashing in concertina-shaped trousers with a patch on the knee? He saw now—what he had never seen before—that it was not because they were crack players that crack players wore Plus

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Fours: it was because they wore Plus Fours that they were crack players. And these Plus Fours had been the property of an Open Champion. Wallace Chesney's bosom swelled, and he was filled, as by some strange gas, with joy—with excitement—with confidence. Yes, for the first time in his golfing life, he felt really confident.

True, the things might have been a shade less gaudy: they might perhaps have hit the eye with a slightly less violent punch: but what of that? True, again, he could scarcely hope to avoid the censure of his club-mates when he appeared like this on the links: but what of *that*? His club-mates must set their teeth and learn to bear these Plus Fours like men. That was what Wallace Chesney thought about it. If they did not like his Plus Fours, let them go and play golf somewhere else.

"How much?" he muttered, thickly. And the Brothers Cohen clustered grimly round with notebooks and pencils.

In predicting a stormy reception for his new apparel, Wallace Chesney had not been unduly pessimistic. The moment he entered the club-house Disaffection reared its ugly head. Friends of years' standing called loudly for the committee, and there was a small and vehement party of the left wing, headed by Raymond Gandle, who was an artist by profession, and consequently had a sensitive eye, which advocated the tearing off and public burial of the obnoxious garment. But, prepared as he had been for some such demonstration on the part of the coarser-minded, Wallace had hoped for better things when he should meet Charlotte Dix, the girl who loved him. Charlotte, he had supposed, would understand and sympathize.

Instead of which, she uttered a piercing cry and staggered to a bench, whence a moment later she delivered her ultimatum.

"Quick!" she said. "Before I have to look again."

"What do you mean?"

"Pop straight back into the changing-room while I've got my eyes shut, and remove the fancy-dress."

"What's wrong with them?"

"Darling," said Charlotte, "I think it's sweet and patriotic of you to be proud of your cycling-club colours or whatever they are, but you mustn't wear them on the links. It will unsettle the caddies."

"They *are* a trifle on the bright side," admitted Wallace.

"But it helps my game, wearing them. I was trying a few practice-shots just now, and I couldn't go wrong. Slammed the ball on the meat every time. They inspire me, if you know what I mean. Come on, let's be starting."

Charlotte opened her eyes incredulously.

"You can't seriously mean that you're really going to *play* in—those? It's against the rules. There must be a rule somewhere in the book against coming out looking like a sunset. Won't you go and burn them for my sake?"

"But I tell you they give me confidence. I sort of squint down at them when I'm addressing the ball, and I feel like a pro."

"Then the only thing to do is for me to play you for them. Come on, Wally, be a sportsman. I'll give you a half and play you for the whole outfit—the breeches, the red jacket, the little cap, and the belt with the snake's-head buckle. I'm sure all those things must have gone with the breeches. Is it a bargain?"

Strolling on the club-house terrace some two hours later, Raymond Gandle encountered Charlotte and Wallace coming up from the eighteenth green.

"Just the girl I wanted to see," said Raymond. "Miss Dix, I represent a select committee of my fellow-members, and I have come to ask you on their behalf to use the influence of a good woman to induce Wally to destroy those Plus Fours of his, which we all consider nothing short of Bolshevik propaganda and a menace to the public weal. May I rely on you?"

"You may not," retorted Charlotte. "They are the poor boy's mascot. You've no idea how they have improved his game. He has just beaten me hollow. I am going to try to learn to bear them, so you must. Really, you've no notion how he has come on. My cripple won't be able to give him more than a couple of bisques if he keeps up this form."

"It's something about the things," said Wallace. "They give me confidence."

"They give *me* a pain in the neck," said Raymond Gandle.

To the thinking man nothing is more remarkable in this life than the way in which Humanity adjusts itself to conditions which at their outset might well have appeared intolerable. Some great cataclysm occurs, some storm or earthquake, shaking the community to its foundations; and after the first pardonable

consternation one finds the sufferers resuming their ordinary pursuits as if nothing had happened. There have been few more striking examples of this adaptability than the behaviour of the members of our golf-club under the impact of Wallace Chesney's Plus Fours. For the first few days it is not too much to say that they were stunned. Nervous players sent their caddies on in front of them at blind holes, so that they might be warned in time of Wallace's presence ahead and not have him happening to them all of a sudden. And even the pro. was not unaffected. Brought up in Scotland in an atmosphere of tartan kilts, he nevertheless winced, and a startled "Hoots!" was forced from his lips when Wallace Chesney suddenly appeared in the valley as he was about to drive from the fifth tee.

But in about a week conditions were back to normalcy. Within ten days the Plus Fours became a familiar feature of the landscape, and were accepted as such without comment. They were pointed out to strangers together with the waterfall, the Lovers' Leap, and the view from the eighth green as things you ought not to miss when visiting the course; but apart from that one might almost say they were ignored. And meanwhile Wallace Chesney continued day by day to make the most extraordinary progress in his play.

As I have said before, and I think you will agree with me when I have told you what happened subsequently, it was probably a case of auto-hypnosis. There is no other sphere in which a belief in oneself has such immediate effects as it has in golf. And Wallace, having acquired self-confidence, went on from strength to strength. In under a week he had ploughed his way through the Unfortunate Incidents—of which class Peter Willard was the best example—and was challenging the fellows who kept three shots in five somewhere on the fairway. A month later he was holding his own with ten-handicap men. And by the middle of the summer he was so far advanced that his name occasionally cropped up in speculative talks on the subject of the July medal. One might have been excused for supposing that, as far as Wallace Chesney was concerned, all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

And yet——

The first inkling I received that anything was wrong came through a chance meeting with Raymond Gandle who happened to pass my gate on his way back from the links just as I drove

up in my taxi; for I had been away from home for many weeks on a protracted business tour. I welcomed Gandle's advent and invited him in to smoke a pipe and put me abreast of local gossip. He came readily enough—and seemed, indeed, to have something on his mind and to be glad of the opportunity of revealing it to a sympathetic auditor.

"And how," I asked him, when we were comfortably settled, "did your game this afternoon come out?"

"Oh, he beat me," said Gandle, and it seemed to me that there was a note of bitterness in his voice.

"Then He, whoever he was, must have been an extremely competent performer," I replied, courteously, for Gandle was one of the finest players in the club. "Unless, of course, you were giving him some impossible handicap."

"No; we played level."

"Indeed! Who was your opponent?"

"Chesney."

"Wallace Chesney! And he beat you playing level! This is the most amazing thing I have ever heard."

"He's improved out of all knowledge."

"He must have done. Do you think he would ever beat you again?"

"No. Because he won't have the chance."

"You surely do not mean that you will not play him because you are afraid of being beaten?"

"It isn't being beaten I mind——"

And if I omit to report the remainder of his speech it is not merely because it contained expressions with which I am reluctant to sully my lips, but because, omitting these expletives, what he said was almost word for word what you were saying to me just now about Nathaniel Frisby. It was, it seemed, Wallace Chesney's manner, his arrogance, his attitude of belonging to some superior order of being that had so wounded Raymond Gandle. Wallace Chesney had, it appeared, criticized Gandle's mashie-play in no friendly spirit; had hung up the game on the fourteenth tee in order to show him how to place his feet; and on the way back to the club-house had said that the beauty of golf was that the best player could enjoy a round even with a dud, because, though there might be no interest in the match, he could always amuse himself by playing for his medal score.

I was profoundly shaken.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Wallace Chesney!" I exclaimed. "Was it really Wallace Chesney who behaved in the manner you describe?"

"Unless he's got a twin brother of the same name, it was."

"Wallace Chesney a victim to swelled head! I can hardly credit it."

"Well, you needn't take my word for it unless you want to. Ask anybody. It isn't often he can get anyone to play with him now."

"You horrify me!"

Raymond Gandle smoked a while in brooding silence.

"You've heard about his engagement?" he said at length.

"I have heard nothing, nothing. What about his engagement?"

"Charlotte Dix has broken it off."

"No!"

"Yes. Couldn't stand him any longer."

I got rid of Gandle as soon as I could. I made my way as quickly as possible to the house where Charlotte lived with her aunt. I was determined to sift this matter to the bottom and to do all that lay in my power to heal the breach between two young people for whom I had a great affection.

"I have just heard the news," I said, when the aunt had retired to some secret lair, as aunts do, and Charlotte and I were alone.

"What news?" said Charlotte, dully. I thought she looked pale and ill, and she had certainly grown thinner.

"This dreadful news about your engagement to Wallace Chesney. Tell me, why did you do this thing? Is there no hope of a reconciliation?"

"Not unless Wally becomes his old self again."

"But I had always regarded you two as ideally suited to one another."

"Wally has completely changed in the last few weeks. Haven't you heard?"

"Only sketchily, from Raymond Gandle."

"I refuse," said Charlotte, proudly, all the woman in her leaping to her eyes, "to marry a man who treats me as if I were a kronen at the present rate of exchange, merely because I slice an occasional tee-shot. The afternoon I broke off the engagement"—her voice shook, and I could see that her indifference was but a mask—"the afternoon I broke off the en-gug-gug-

THE HEART OF A GOOF

gagement, he t-told me I ought to use an iron off the tee instead of a dud-dud-driver."

And the stricken girl burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing. And realizing that, if matters had gone as far as that, there was little I could do, I pressed her hand silently and left her.

But though it seemed hopeless I decided to persevere. I turned my steps towards Wallace Chesney's bungalow, resolved to make one appeal to the man's better feelings. He was in his sitting-room when I arrived, polishing a putter; and it seemed significant to me, even in that tense moment, that the putter was quite an ordinary one, such as any capable player might use. In the brave old happy days of his dudhood, the only putters you ever found in the society of Wallace Chesney were patent self-adjusting things that looked like croquet mallets that had taken the wrong turning in childhood.

"Well, Wallace, my boy," I said.

"Hallo!" said Wallace Chesney. "So you're back?"

We fell into conversation, and I had not been in the room two minutes before I realized that what I had been told about the change in him was nothing more than the truth. The man's bearing and his every remark were insufferably bumptious. He spoke of his prospects in the July medal competition as if the issue were already settled. He scoffed at his rivals.

I had some little difficulty in bringing the talk round to the matter which I had come to discuss.

"My boy," I said at length, "I have just heard the sad news."

"What sad news?"

"I have been talking to Charlotte——"

"Oh, that!" said Wallace Chesney.

"She was telling me——"

"Perhaps it's all for the best."

"All for the best? What do you mean?"

"Well," said Wallace, "one doesn't wish, of course, to say anything ungallant, but, after all, poor Charlotte's handicap is fourteen and wouldn't appear to have much chance of getting any lower. I mean, there's such a thing as a fellow throwing himself away."

Was I revolted at these callous words? For a moment, yes. Then it struck me that, though he had uttered them with a light laugh, that laugh had had in it more than a touch of bravado.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

I looked at him keenly. There was a bored, discontented expression in his eyes, a line of pain about his mouth.

"My boy," I said, gravely, "you are not happy."

For an instant I think he would have denied the imputation. But my visit had coincided with one of those twilight moods in which a man requires, above all else, sympathy. He uttered a weary sigh.

"I'm fed up," he admitted. "It's a funny thing. When I was a dud, I used to think how perfect it must be to be scratch. I used to watch the cracks buzzing round the course and envy them. It's all a fraud. The only time when you enjoy golf is when an occasional decent shot is enough to make you happy for the day. I'm plus two, and I'm bored to death. I'm too good. And what's the result? Everybody's jealous of me. Everybody's got it in for me. Nobody loves me."

His voice rose in a note of anguish, and at the sound his terrier, which had been sleeping on the rug, crept forward and licked his hand.

"The dog loves you," I said, gently, for I was touched.

"Yes, but I don't love the dog," said Wallace Chesney.

"Now come, Wallace," I said. "Be reasonable, my boy. It is only your unfortunate manner on the links which has made you perhaps a little unpopular at the moment. Why not pull yourself up? Why ruin your whole life with this arrogance? All that you need is a little tact, a little forbearance. Charlotte, I am sure, is just as fond of you as ever, but you have wounded her pride. Why must you be unkind about her tee-shots?"

Wallace Chesney shook his head despondently.

"I can't help it," he said. "It exasperates me to see anyone foozling, and I have to say so."

"Then there is nothing to be done," I said, sadly.

All the medal competitions at our club are, as you know, important events; but, as you are also aware, none of them is looked forward to so keenly or contested so hotly as the one in July. At the beginning of the year of which I am speaking, Raymond Gandle had been considered the probable winner of the fixture; but as the season progressed and Wallace Chesney's skill developed to such a remarkable extent most of us were reluctantly inclined to put our money on the latter. Reluctantly, because Wallace's unpopularity was now so general that the

THE HEART OF A GOOF

thought of his winning was distasteful to all. It grieved me to see how cold his fellow-members were towards him. He drove off from the first tee without a solitary hand-clap; and, though the drive was of admirable quality and nearly carried the green, there was not a single cheer. I noticed Charlotte Dix among the spectators. The poor girl was looking sad and wan.

In the draw for partners Wallace had had Peter Willard allotted to him; and he muttered to me in a quite audible voice that it was as bad as handicapping him half a dozen strokes to make him play with such a hopeless performer. I do not think Peter heard, but it would not have made much difference to him if he had, for I doubt if anything could have had much effect for the worse on his game. Peter Willard always entered for the medal competition, because he said that competition-play was good for the nerves.

On this occasion he topped his ball badly, and Wallace lit his pipe with the exaggeratedly patient air of an irritated man. When Peter topped his second also, Wallace was moved to speech.

"For goodness' sake," he snapped, "what's the good of playing at all if you insist on lifting your head? Keep it down, man, keep it down. You don't need to watch to see where the ball is going. It isn't likely to go as far as all that. Make up your mind to count three before you look up."

"Thanks," said Peter, meekly. There was no pride in Peter to be wounded. He knew the sort of player he was.

The couples were now moving off with smooth rapidity, and the course was dotted with the figures of players and their accompanying spectators. A fair proportion of these latter had decided to follow the fortunes of Raymond Gandle, but by far the larger number were sticking to Wallace, who right from the start showed that Gandle or anyone else would have to return a very fine card to beat him. He was out in thirty-seven, two above bogey, and with the assistance of a superb second, which landed the ball within a foot of the pin, got a three on the tenth, where a four is considered good. I mention this to show that by the time he arrived at the short lake-hole Wallace Chesney was at the top of his form. Not even the fact that he had been obliged to let the next couple through owing to Peter Willard losing his ball had been enough to upset him.

The course has been rearranged since, but at that time the

THE HEART OF A GOOF

lake-hole, which is now the second, was the eleventh, and was generally looked on as the crucial hole in a medal round. Wallace no doubt realized this, but the knowledge did not seem to affect him. He lit his pipe with the utmost coolness: and, having replaced the match-box in his hip-pocket, stood smoking nonchalantly as he waited for the couple in front to get off the green.

They holed out eventually, and Wallace walked to the tee. As he did so, he was startled to receive a resounding smack.

"Sorry," said Peter Willard, apologetically. "Hope I didn't hurt you. A wasp."

And he pointed to the corpse, which was lying in a used-up attitude on the ground.

"Afraid it would sting you," said Peter.

"Oh, thanks," said Wallace.

He spoke a little stiffly, for Peter Willard had a large, hard, flat hand, the impact of which had shaken him up considerably. Also, there had been laughter in the crowd. He was fuming as he bent to address his ball, and his annoyance became acute when, just as he reached the top of his swing, Peter Willard suddenly spoke.

"Just a second, old man," said Peter. Wallace spun round, outraged.

"What is it? I do wish you would wait till I've made my shot."

"Just as you like," said Peter, humbly.

"There is no greater crime that a man can commit on the links than to speak to a fellow when he's making his stroke."

"Of course, of course," acquiesced Peter, crushed.

Wallace turned to his ball once more. He was vaguely conscious of a discomfort to which he could not at the moment give a name. At first he thought that he was having a spasm of lumbago, and this surprised him, for he had never in his life been subject to even a suspicion of that malady. A moment later he realized that this diagnosis had been wrong.

"Good heavens!" he cried, leaping nimbly some two feet into the air. "I'm on fire!"

"Yes," said Peter, delighted at his ready grasp of the situation. "That's what I wanted to mention just now."

Wallace slapped vigorously at the seat of his Plus Fours.

"It must have been when I killed that wasp," said Peter,

beginning to see clearly into the matter.* "You had a match-box in your pocket."

Wallace was in no mood to stop and discuss first causes. He was springing up and down on his pyre, beating at the flames.

"Do you know what I should do if I were you?" said Peter Willard. "I should jump into the lake."

One of the cardinal rules of golf is that a player shall accept no advice from anyone but his own caddie; but the warmth about his lower limbs had now become so generous that Wallace was prepared to stretch a point. He took three rapid strides and entered the water with a splash.

The lake, though muddy, is not deep, and presently Wallace was to be observed standing up to his waist some few feet from the shore.

"That ought to have put it out," said Peter Willard. "It was a bit of luck that it happened at this hole." He stretched out a hand to the bather. "Catch hold, old man, and I'll pull you out."

"No!" said Wallace Chesney.

"Why not?"

"Never mind!" said Wallace, austere. He bent as near to Peter as he was able.

"Send a caddie up to the club-house to fetch my grey flannel trousers from my locker," he whispered, tensely.

"Oh, ah!" said Peter.

It was some little time before Wallace, encircled by a group of male spectators, was enabled to change his costume; and during the interval he continued to stand waist-deep in the water, to the chagrin of various couples who came to the tee in the course of their round and complained with not a little bitterness that his presence there added a mental hazard to an already difficult hole. Eventually, however, he found himself back ashore, his ball before him, his mashie in his hand.

"Carry on," said Peter Willard, as the couple in front left the green. "All clear now."

Wallace Chesney addressed his ball. And, even as he did so, he was suddenly aware that an odd psychological change had taken place in himself. He was aware of a strange weakness. The charred remains of the Plus Fours were lying under an adjacent bush; and, clad in the old grey flannels of his early golfing days, Wallace felt diffident, feeble, uncertain of himself.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

It was as though virtue had gone out of him, as if some indispensable adjunct to good play had been removed. His corrugated trouser-leg caught his eye as he waggled, and all at once he became acutely alive to the fact that many eyes were watching him. The audience seemed to press on him like a blanket. He felt as he had been wont to feel in the old days when he had had to drive off the first tee in front of a terrace-full of scoffing critics.

The next moment his ball had bounded weakly over the intervening patch of turf and was in the water.

"Hard luck!" said Peter Willard, ever a generous foe. And the words seemed to touch some almost atrophied chord in Wallace's breast. A sudden love for his species flooded over him. Dashed decent of Peter, he thought, to sympathize. Peter was a good chap. So were the spectators good chaps. So was everybody, even his caddie.

Peter Willard, as if resolved to make his sympathy practical, also rolled his ball into the lake.

"Hard luck!" said Wallace Chesney, and started as he said it; for many weeks had passed since he had commiserated with an opponent. He felt a changed man. A better, sweeter, kindlier man. It was as if a curse had fallen from him.

He teed up another ball, and swung.

"Hard luck!" said Peter.

"Hard luck!" said Wallace, a moment later.

"Hard luck!" said Peter, a moment after that.

Wallace Chesney stood on the tee watching the spot in the water where his third ball had fallen. The crowd was now openly amused, and, as he listened to their happy laughter, it was borne in upon Wallace that he, too, was amused and happy. A weird, almost effervescent exhilaration filled him. He turned and beamed upon the spectators. He waved his mashie cheerily at them. This, he felt, was something like golf. This was golf as it should be—not the dull, mechanical thing which had bored him during all these past weeks of his perfection, but a gay, rollicking adventure. That was the soul of golf, the thing that made it the wonderful pursuit it was—that speculativeness, that not knowing where the dickens your ball was going when you hit it, that eternal hoping for the best, that never-failing chanciness. It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and at last this great truth had come home to Wallace Chesney. He

THE HEART OF A GOOF

realized now why pro's. were all grave, silent men who seemed to struggle manfully against some secret sorrow. It was because they were too darned good. Golf had no surprises for them, no gallant spirit of adventure.

"I'm going to get a ball over if I stay here all night," cried Wallace Chesney, gaily, and the crowd echoed his mirth. On the face of Charlotte Dix was the look of a mother whose prodigal son has rolled into the old home once more. She caught Wallace's eye and gesticulated to him blithely.

"The cripple says he'll give you a stroke a hole, Wally!" she shouted.

"I'm ready for him!" bellowed Wallace.

"Hard *luck*!" said Peter Willard.

Under their bush the Plus Fours, charred and dripping, lurked unnoticed. But Wallace Chesney saw them. They caught his eye as he sliced his eleventh into the marshes on the right. It seemed to him that they looked sullen. Disappointed. Baffled.

Wallace Chesney was himself again.

CHAPTER VI

THE AWAKENING OF ROLLO PODMARSH

DOWN on the new bowling-green behind the club-house some sort of competition was in progress. The seats about the smooth strip of turf were crowded, and the weak-minded yapping of the patients made itself plainly audible to the Oldest Member as he sat in his favourite chair in the smoking-room. He shifted restlessly, and a frown marred the placidity of his venerable brow. To the Oldest Member a golf-club was a golf-club, and he resented the introduction of any alien element. He had opposed the institution of tennis-courts; and the suggestion of a bowling-green had stirred him to his depths.

A young man in spectacles came into the smoking-room. His high forehead was aglow, and he lapped up a ginger-ale with the air of one who considers that he has earned it.

"Capital exercise!" he said, beaming upon the Oldest Member.

The Oldest Member laid down his *Vardon On Casual Water*, and peered suspiciously at his companion.

"What did you go round in?" he asked.

"Oh, I wasn't playing golf," said the young man. "Bowls."

"A nauseous pursuit!" said the Oldest Member, coldly, and resumed his reading.

The young man seemed nettled.

"I don't know why you should say that," he retorted. "It's a splendid game."

"I rank it," said the Oldest Member, "with the juvenile pastime of marbles."

The young man pondered for some moments.

"Well, anyway," he said at length, "it was good enough for Drake."

"As I have not the pleasure of the acquaintance of your friend Drake, I am unable to estimate the value of his endorsement."

"*The Drake.* The Spanish Armada Drake. He was playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe when they told him that the Armada was in sight. 'There is time to finish the game,' he replied. That's what Drake thought of bowls."

"If he had been a golfer he would have ignored the Armada altogether."

"It's easy enough to say that," said the young man, with spirit, "but can the history of golf show a parallel case?"

"A million, I should imagine."

"But you've forgotten them, eh?" said the young man, satirically.

"On the contrary," said the Oldest Member. "As a typical instance, neither more nor less remarkable than a hundred others, I will select the story of Rollo Podmarsh." He settled himself comfortably in his chair, and placed the tips of his fingers together. "This Rollo Podmarsh——"

"No, I say!" protested the young man, looking at his watch.

"This Rollo Podmarsh——"

"Yes, but——"

This Rollo Podmarsh (said the Oldest Member) was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and like other young men in that position he had rather allowed a mother's tender care to take the edge off what you might call his rugged manliness. Not to put too fine a point on it, he had permitted his parent to coddle him ever since he had been in the nursery; and now, in his twenty-eighth year, he invariably wore flannel next his skin, changed his shoes the moment they got wet, and—from September to May, inclusive—never went to bed without partaking of a bowl of hot arrowroot. Not, you would say, the stuff of which heroes are made. But you would be wrong. Rollo Podmarsh was a golfer, and consequently pure gold at heart; and in his hour of crisis all the good in him came to the surface.

In giving you this character-sketch of Rollo, I have been at pains to make it crisp, for I observe that you are wriggling in a restless manner and you persist in pulling out that watch of yours and gazing at it. Let me tell you that, if a mere skeleton outline of the man has this effect upon you, I am glad for your sake that you never met his mother. Mrs. Podmarsh could talk with enjoyment for hours on end about her son's character and habits. And, on the September evening on which I introduce her to you, though she had, as a fact, been speaking only for some

THE HEART OF A GOOF

ten minutes, it had seemed like hours to the girl, Mary Kent, who was the party of the second part to the conversation.

Mary Kent was the daughter of an old school-friend of Mrs. Podmarsh, and she had come to spend the autumn and winter with her while her parents were abroad. The scheme had never looked particularly good to Mary, and after ten minutes of her hostess on the subject of Rollo she was beginning to weave dreams of knotted sheets and a swift getaway through the bedroom window in the dark of the night.

"He is a strict teetotaller," said Mrs. Podmarsh.

"Really?"

"And has never smoked in his life."

"Fancy that!"

"But here is the dear boy now," said Mrs. Podmarsh, fondly.

Down the road towards them was coming a tall, well-knit figure in a Norfolk coat and grey flannel trousers. Over his broad shoulders was suspended a bag of golf-clubs.

"Is *that* Mr. Podmarsh?" exclaimed Mary.

She was surprised. After all she had been listening to about the arrowroot and the flannel next the skin and the rest of it, she had pictured the son of the house as a far weedier specimen. She had been expecting to meet a small, slender young man with an eyebrow moustache, and pince-nez; and this person approaching might have stepped straight out of Jack Dempsey's training-camp.

"Does he play golf?" asked Mary, herself an enthusiast.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Podmarsh. "He makes a point of going out on the links once a day. He says the fresh air gives him such an appetite."

Mary, who had taken a violent dislike to Rollo on the evidence of his mother's description of his habits, had softened towards him on discovering that he was a golfer. She now reverted to her previous opinion. A man who could play the noble game from such ignoble motives was beyond the pale.

"Rollo is exceedingly good at golf," proceeded Mrs. Podmarsh. "He scores more than a hundred and twenty every time, while Mr. Burns, who is supposed to be one of the best players in the club, seldom manages to reach eighty. But Rollo is very modest—modesty is one of his best qualities—and you would never guess he was so skilful unless you were told."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Well, Rollo darling, did you have a nice game? You didn't get your feet wet, I hope? This is Mary Kent, dear."

Rollo Podmarsh shook hands with Mary. And at her touch the strange dizzy feeling which had come over him at the sight of her suddenly became increased a thousand-fold. As I see that you are consulting your watch once more, I will not describe his emotions as exhaustively as I might. I will merely say that he had never felt anything resembling this sensation of dazed ecstasy since the occasion when a twenty-foot putt of his, which had been going well off the line, as his putts generally did, had hit a worm-cast sou'-sou'-east of the hole and popped in, giving him a snappy six. Rollo Podmarsh, as you will have divined, was in love at first sight. Which makes it all the sadder to think Mary at the moment was regarding him as an outcast and a blister.

Mrs. Podmarsh, having enfolded her son in a vehement embrace, drew back with a startled exclamation, sniffing.

"Rollo!" she cried. "You smell of tobacco-smoke."

Rollo looked embarrassed.

"Well, the fact is, mother——"

A hard protuberance in his coat-pocket attracted Mrs. Podmarsh's notice. She swooped and drew out a big-bowled pipe.

"Rollo!" she exclaimed, aghast.

"Well, the fact is, mother——"

"Don't you know," cried Mrs. Podmarsh, "that smoking is poisonous, and injurious to the health?"

"Yes. But the fact is, mother——"

"It causes nervous dyspepsia, sleeplessness, gnawing of the stomach, headache, weak eyes, red spots on the skin, throat irritation, asthma, bronchitis, heart failure, lung trouble, catarrh, melancholy, neurasthenia, loss of memory, impaired will-power, rheumatism, lumbago, sciatica, neuritis, heartburn, torpid liver, loss of appetite, enervation, lassitude, lack of ambition, and falling out of hair."

"Yes, I know, mother. But the fact is, Ted Ray smokes all the time he's playing, and I thought it might improve my game."

And it was at these splendid words that Mary Kent felt for the first time that something might be made of Rollo Podmarsh. That she experienced one-millionth of the fervour which was gnawing at his vitals I will not say. A woman does not fall in love in a flash like a man. But at least she no longer regarded

THE HEART OF A GOOF

him with loathing. On the contrary, she found herself liking him. There was, she considered, the right stuff in Rollo. And if, as seemed probable from his mother's conversation, it would take a bit of digging to bring it up, well—she liked rescue-work and had plenty of time.

Mr. Arnold Bennett, in a recent essay, advises young bachelors to proceed with a certain caution in matters of the heart. They should, he asserts, first decide whether or not they are ready for love; then, whether it is better to marry earlier or later; thirdly, whether their ambitions are such that a wife will prove a hindrance to their career. These romantic preliminaries concluded, they may grab a girl and go to it. Rollo Podmarsh would have made a tough audience for these precepts. Since the days of Antony and Cleopatra probably no one had ever got more swiftly off the mark. One may say that he was in love before he had come within two yards of the girl. And each day that passed found him more nearly up to his eyebrows in the tender emotion.

He thought of Mary when he was changing his wet shoes; he dreamed of her while putting flannel next his skin; he yearned for her over the evening arrowroot. Why, the man was such a slave to his devotion that he actually went to the length of purloining small articles belonging to her. Two days after Mary's arrival Rollo Podmarsh was driving off the first tee with one of her handkerchiefs, a powder-puff, and a dozen hairpins secreted in his left breast-pocket. When dressing for dinner he used to take them out and look at them, and at night he slept with them under his pillow. Heavens, how he loved that girl!

One evening when they had gone out into the garden together to look at the new moon—Rollo, by his mother's advice, wearing a woollen scarf to protect his throat—he endeavoured to bring the conversation round to the important subject. Mary's last remark had been about earwigs. Considered as a cue, it lacked a subtle something; but Rollo was not the man to be discouraged by that.

"Talking of earwigs, Miss Kent," he said, in a low musical voice, "have you ever been in love?"

Mary was silent for a moment before replying.

"Yes, once. When I was eleven. With a conjurer who came to perform at my birthday-party. He took a rabbit and two eggs out of my hair, and life seemed one grand sweet song."

"Never since then?"

"Never."

"Suppose—just for the sake of argument—suppose you ever did love anyone—er—what sort of a man would it be?"

"A hero," said Mary, promptly.

"A hero?" said Rollo, somewhat taken aback. "What sort of hero?"

"Any sort. I could only love a really brave man—a man who had done some wonderful heroic action."

"Shall we go in?" said Rollo, hoarsely. "The air is a little chilly."

We have now, therefore, arrived at a period in Rollo Podmarsh's career which might have inspired those lines of Henley's about "the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole". What with one thing and another, he was in an almost Job-like condition of despondency. I say "one thing and another", for it was not only hopeless love that weighed him down. In addition to being hopelessly in love, he was greatly depressed about his golf.

On Rollo in his capacity of golfer I have so far not dwelt. You have probably allowed yourself, in spite of the significant episode of the pipe, to dismiss him as one of those placid, contented—shall I say dilettante?—golfers who are so frequent in these degenerate days. Such was not the case. Outwardly placid, Rollo was consumed inwardly by an ever-burning fever of ambition. His aims were not extravagant. He did not want to become amateur champion, nor even to win a monthly medal; but he did, with his whole soul, desire one of these days to go round the course in under a hundred. This feat accomplished, it was his intention to set the seal on his golfing career by playing a real money-match; and already he had selected his opponent, a certain Colonel Bodger, a tottery performer of advanced years who for the last decade had been a martyr to lumbago.

But it began to look as if even the modest goal he had marked out for himself were beyond his powers. Day after day he would step on to the first tee, glowing with zeal and hope, only to crawl home in the quiet evenfall with another hundred and twenty on his card. Little wonder, then, that he began to lose his appetite and would moan feebly at the sight of a poached egg.

With Mrs. Podmarsh sedulously watching over her son's health,

THE HEART OF A GOOF

you might have supposed that this inability on his part to teach the foodstuffs to take a joke would have caused consternation in the home. But it so happened that Rollo's mother had recently been reading a medical treatise in which an eminent physician stated that we all eat too much nowadays, and that the secret of a happy life is to lay off the carbohydrates to some extent. She was, therefore, delighted to observe the young man's moderation in the matter of food, and frequently held him up as an example to be noted and followed by little Lettice Willoughby, her granddaughter, who was a good and consistent trencherwoman, particularly rough on the puddings. Little Lettice, I should mention, was the daughter of Rollo's sister Enid, who lived in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Willoughby had been compelled to go away on a visit a few days before and had left her child with Mrs. Podmarsh during her absence.

You can fool some of the people all the time, but Lettice Willoughby was not of the type that is easily deceived. A nice, old-fashioned child would no doubt have accepted without questioning her grandmother's dictum that roly-poly pudding could not fail to hand a devastating wallop to the blood-pressure, and that to take two helpings of it was practically equivalent to walking right into the family vault. A child with less decided opinions of her own would have been impressed by the spectacle of her uncle refusing sustenance, and would have received without demur the statement that he did it because he felt that abstinence was good for his health. Lettice was a modern child and knew better. She had had experience of this loss of appetite and its significance. The first symptom which had preceded the demise of poor old Ponto, who had recently handed in his portfolio after holding office for ten years as the Willoughby family dog, had been this same disinclination to absorb nourishment. Besides, she was an observant child, and had not failed to note the haggard misery in her uncle's eyes. She tackled him squarely on the subject one morning after breakfast. Rollo had retired into the more distant parts of the garden, and was leaning forward, when she found him, with his head buried in his hands.

"Hallo, uncle," said Lettice.

Rollo looked up wanly.

"Ah, child!" he said. He was fond of his niece.

"Aren't you feeling well, uncle?"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Far, far from well."

"It's old age, I expect," said Lettice.

"I feel old," admitted Rollo. "Old and battered. Ah, Lettice, laugh and be gay while you can."

"All right, uncle."

"Make the most of your happy, careless, smiling, halcyon childhood."

"Right-o, uncle."

"When you get to my age, dear, you will realize that it is a sad, hopeless world. A world where, if you keep your head down, you forget to let the club-head lead: where even if you do happen by a miracle to keep 'em straight with your brassie, you blow up on the green and fizzle a six-inch putt."

Lettice could not quite understand what Uncle Rollo was talking about, but she gathered broadly that she had been correct in supposing him to be in a bad state, and her warm, childish heart was filled with pity for him. She walked thoughtfully away, and Rollo resumed his reverie.

Into each life, as the poet says, some rain must fall. So much had recently been falling into Rollo's that, when Fortune at last sent along a belated sunbeam, it exercised a cheering effect out of all proportion to its size. By this I mean that when, some four days after his conversation with Lettice, Mary Kent asked him to play golf with her, he read into the invitation a significance which only a lover could have seen in it. I will not go so far as to say that Rollo Podmarsh looked on Mary Kent's suggestion that they should have a round together as actually tantamount to a revelation of undying love; but he certainly regarded it as a most encouraging sign. It seemed to him that things were beginning to move, that Rollo Preferred were on a rising market. Gone was the gloom of the past days. He forgot those sad, solitary wanderings of his in the bushes at the bottom of the garden; he forgot that his mother had bought him a new set of winter woollies which felt like horsehair; he forgot that for the last few evenings his arrowroot had tasted rummy. His whole mind was occupied with the astounding fact that she had voluntarily offered to play golf with him, and he walked out on to the first tee filled with a yeasty exhilaration which nearly caused him to burst into song.

"How shall we play?" asked Mary. "I am a twelve. What is your handicap?"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Rollo was under the disadvantage of not actually possessing a handicap. He had a sort of private system of book-keeping of his own by which he took strokes over if they did not seem to him to be up to sample, and allowed himself five-foot putts at discretion. So he had never actually handed in the three cards necessary for handicapping purposes.

"I don't exactly know," he said. "It's my ambition to get round in under a hundred, but I've never managed it yet."

"Never?"

"Never! It's strange, but something always seems to go wrong."

"Perhaps you'll manage it today," said Mary, encouragingly, so encouragingly that it was all that Rollo could do to refrain from flinging himself at her feet and barking like a dog. "Well, I'll start you two holes up, and we'll see how we get on. Shall I take the honour?"

She drove off one of those fair-to-medium balls which go with a twelve handicap. Not a great length, but nice and straight.

"Splendid!" cried Rollo, devoutly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mary. "I wouldn't call it anything special."

Titanic emotions were surging in Rollo's bosom as he addressed his ball. He had never felt like this before, especially on the first tee—where as a rule he found himself overcome with a nervous humility.

"Oh, Mary! Mary!" he breathed to himself as he swung.

You who squander your golden youth fooling about on a bowling-green will not understand the magic of those three words. But if you were a golfer, you would realize that in selecting just that invocation to breathe to himself Rollo Podmarsh had hit, by sheer accident, on the ideal method of achieving a fine drive. Let me explain. The first two words, tensely breathed, are just sufficient to take a man with the proper slowness to the top of his swing; the first syllable of the second "Mary" exactly coincides with the striking of the ball; and the final "ry!" takes care of the follow-through. The consequence was that Rollo's ball, instead of hopping down the hill like an embarrassed duck, as was its usual practice, sang off the tee with a scream like a shell, nodded in passing Mary's ball, where it lay some hundred and fifty yards down the course, and, carrying on from there, came to rest within easy distance of the

green. For the first time in his golfing life Rollo Podmarsh had hit a nifty.

Mary followed the ball's flight with astonished eyes.

"But this will never do!" she exclaimed. "I can't possibly start you two up if you're going to do this sort of thing."

Rollo blushed.

"I shouldn't think it would happen again," he said. "I've never done a drive like that before."

"But it must happen again," said Mary, firmly. "This is evidently your day. If you don't get round in under a hundred today, I shall never forgive you."

Rollo shut his eyes, and his lips moved feverishly. He was registering a vow that, come what might, he would not fail her. A minute later he was holing out in three, one under bogey.

The second hole is the short lake-hole. Bogey is three, and Rollo generally did it in four; for it was his custom not to count any balls he might sink in the water, but to start afresh with one which happened to get over, and then take three putts. But today something seemed to tell him that he would not require the aid of this ingenious system. As he took his mashie from the bag, he *knew* that his first shot would soar successfully on to the green.

"Ah, Mary!" he breathed as he swung.

These subtleties are wasted on a worm, if you will pardon the expression, like yourself, who, possibly owing to a defective education, is content to spend life's springtime rolling wooden balls across a lawn; but I will explain that in altering and shortening his soliloquy at this juncture Rollo had done the very thing any good pro. would have recommended. If he had murmured, "Oh, Mary! Mary!" as before he would have over-swung. "Ah, Mary!" was exactly right for a half-swing with the mashie. His ball shot up in a beautiful arc, and trickled to within six inches of the hole.

Mary was delighted. There was something about this big, diffident man which had appealed from the first to everything in her that was motherly.

"Marvellous!" she said. "You'll get a two. Five for the first two holes! Why, you simply must get round in under a hundred now." She swung, but too lightly; and her ball fell in the water. "I'll give you this," she said, without the slightest chagrin, for this girl had a beautiful nature. "Let's get on to the third. Four up! Why, you're wonderful!"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

And not to weary you with too much detail, I will simply remark that, stimulated by her gentle encouragement, Rollo Podmarsh actually came off the ninth green with a medal score of forty-six for the half-round. A ten on the seventh had spoiled his card to some extent, and a nine on the eighth had not helped, but nevertheless here he was in forty-six, with the easier half of the course before him. He tingled all over—partly because he was wearing the new winter woollies to which I have alluded previously, but principally owing to triumph, elation, and love. He gazed at Mary as Dante might have gazed at Beatrice on one of his particularly sentimental mornings.

Mary uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, I've just remembered," she exclaimed. "I promised to write last night to Jane Simpson and give her that new formula for knitting jumpers. I think I'll phone her now from the club-house and then it'll be off my mind. You go on to the tenth, and I'll join you there."

Rollo proceeded over the brow of the hill to the tenth tee, and was filling in the time with practice-swings when he heard his name spoken.

"Good gracious, Rollo! I couldn't believe it was you at first."

He turned to see his sister, Mrs. Willoughby, the mother of the child Lettice.

"Hallo!" he said. "When did you get back?"

"Late last night. Why, it's extraordinary!"

"Hope you had a good time. What's extraordinary? Listen, Enid. Do you know what I've done? Forty-six for the first nine! Forty-six! And holing out every putt."

"Oh, then that accounts for it."

"Accounts for what?"

"Why, your looking so pleased with life. I got an idea from Letty, when she wrote to me, that you were at death's door. Your gloom seems to have made a deep impression on the child. Her letter was full of it."

Rollo was moved.

"Dear little Letty! She is wonderfully sympathetic."

"Well, I must be off now," said Enid Willoughby. "I'm late. Oh, talking of Letty. Don't children say the funniest things! She wrote in her letter that you were very old and wretched and that she was going to put you out of your misery."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Ha ha ha!" laughed Rollo.

"We had to poison poor old Ponto the other day, you know, and poor little Letty was inconsolable till we explained to her that it was really the kindest thing to do, because he was so old and ill. But just imagine her thinking of wanting to end *your* sufferings!"

"Ha ha!" laughed Rollo. "Ha ha h——!"

His voice trailed off into a broken gurgle. Quite suddenly a sinister thought had come to him.

The arrowroot had tasted rummy!

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" asked Mrs. Willoughby, regarding his ashen face.

Rollo could find no words. He yammered speechlessly. Yes, for several nights the arrowroot had tasted very rummy. Rummy! There was no other adjective. Even as he plied the spoon he had said to himself: "This arrowroot tastes rummy!" And—he uttered a sharp yelp as he remembered—it had been little Lettice who had brought it to him. He recollected being touched at the time by the kindly act.

"What is the matter, Rollo?" demanded Mrs. Willoughby, sharply. "Don't stand there looking like a dying duck."

"I am a dying duck," responded Rollo, hoarsely. "A dying man, I mean. Enid, that infernal child has poisoned me!"

"Don't be ridiculous! And kindly don't speak of her like that!"

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't blame her, I suppose. No doubt her motives were good. But the fact remains."

"Rollo, you're too absurd."

"But the arrowroot tasted rummy."

"I never knew you could be such an idiot," said his exasperated sister with sisterly outspokenness. "I thought you would think it quaint. I thought you would roar with laughter."

"I did—till I remembered about the rumminess of the arrowroot."

Mrs. Willoughby uttered an impatient exclamation and walked away.

Rollo Podmarsh stood on the tenth tee, a volcano of mixed emotions. Mechanically he pulled out his pipe and lit it. But he found that he could not smoke. In this supreme crisis of his life tobacco seemed to have lost its magic. He put the pipe back in his pocket and gave himself up to his thoughts. Now

THE HEART OF A GOOF

terror gripped him; anon a sort of gentle melancholy. It was so hard that he should be compelled to leave the world just as he had begun to hit 'em right.

And then in the welter of his thoughts there came one of practical value. To wit, that by hurrying to the doctor's without delay he might yet be saved. There might be antidotes.

He turned to go and there was Mary Kent standing beside him with her bright, encouraging smile.

"I'm sorry I kept you so long," she said. "It's your honour. Fire away, and remember that you've got to do this nine in fifty-three at the outside."

Rollo's thoughts flitted wistfully to the snug surgery where Dr. Brown was probably sitting at this moment surrounded by the finest antidotes.

"Do you know, I think I ought to——"

"Of course you ought to," said Mary. "If you did the first nine in forty-six, you can't possibly take fifty-three coming in."

For one long moment Rollo continued to hesitate—a moment during which the instinct of self-preservation seemed as if it must win the day. All his life he had been brought up to be nervous about his health, and panic gripped him. But there is a deeper, nobler instinct than that of self-preservation—the instinctive desire of a golfer who is at the top of his form to go on and beat his medal-score record. And little by little this grand impulse began to dominate Rollo. If, he felt, he went off now to take antidotes, the doctor might possibly save his life; but reason told him that never again would he be likely to do the first nine in forty-six. He would have to start all over afresh.

Rollo Podmarsh hesitated no longer. With a pale, set face he teed up his ball and drove.

If I were telling this story to a golfer instead of to an excrescence—I use the word in the kindest spirit—who spends his time messing about on a bowling-green, nothing would please me better than to describe shot by shot Rollo's progress over the remaining nine holes. Epics have been written with less material. But these details would, I am aware, be wasted on you. Let it suffice that by the time his last approach trickled on to the eighteenth green he had taken exactly fifty shots.

"Three for it!" said Mary Kent. "Steady now! Take it quite easy and be sure to lay your second dead."

It was prudent counsel, but Rollo was now thoroughly above himself. He had got his feet wet in a puddle on the sixteenth, but he did not care. His winter woollies seemed to be lined with ants, but he ignored them. All he knew was that he was on the last green in ninety-six, and he meant to finish in style. No tame three putts for him! His ball was five yards away, but he aimed for the back of the hole and brought his putter down with a whack. Straight and true the ball sped, hit the tin, jumped high in the air, and fell into the hole with a rattle.

"Oo!" cried Mary.

Rollo Podmarsh wiped his forehead and leaned dizzily on his putter. For a moment, so intense is the fervour induced by the game of games, all he could think of was that he had gone round in ninety-seven. Then, as one waking from a trance, he began to appreciate his position. The fever passed, and a clammy dismay took possession of him. He had achieved his life's ambition; but what now? Already he was conscious of a curious discomfort within him. He felt as he supposed Italians of the Middle Ages must have felt after dropping in to take pot-luck with the Borgias. It was hard. He had gone round in ninety-seven, but he could never take the next step in the career which he had mapped out in his dreams—the money-match with the lumbago-stricken Colonel Bodger.

Mary Kent was fluttering round him, bubbling congratulations, but Rollo sighed.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks very much. But the trouble is, I'm afraid I'm going to die almost immediately. I've been poisoned!"

"Poisoned!"

"Yes. Nobody is to blame. Everything was done with the best intentions. But there it is."

"But I don't understand."

Rollo explained. Mary listened pallidly.

"Are you sure?" she gasped.

"Quite sure," said Rollo, gravely. "The arrowroot tasted rummy."

"But arrowroot always does."

Rollo shook his head.

"No," he said. "It tastes like warm blotting-paper, but not rummy."

Mary was sniffing.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Don't cry," urged Rollo, tenderly. "Don't cry."

"But I must. And I've come out without a handkerchief."

"Permit me," said Rollo, producing one of her best from his left breast-pocket.

"I wish I had a powder-puff," said Mary.

"Allow me," said Rollo. "And your hair has become a little disordered. If I may——" And from the same reservoir he drew a handful of hairpins.

Mary gazed at these exhibits with astonishment.

"But these are mine," she said.

"Yes. I sneaked them from time to time."

"But why?"

"Because I loved you," said Rollo. And in a few moving sentences which I will not trouble you with he went on to elaborate this theme.

Mary listened with her heart full of surging emotions, which I cannot possibly go into if you persist in looking at that damned watch of yours. The scales had fallen from her eyes. She had thought slightly of this man because he had been a little over-careful of his health, and all the time he had had within him the potentiality of heroism. Something seemed to snap inside her.

"Rollo!" she cried, and flung herself into his arms.

"Mary!" muttered Rollo, gathering her up.

"I told you it was all nonsense," said Mrs. Willoughby, coming up at this tense moment and going on with the conversation where she had left off. "I've just seen Letty, and she said she meant to put you out of your misery but the chemist wouldn't sell her any poison, so she let it go."

Rollo disentangled himself from Mary.

"What?" he cried.

Mrs. Willoughby repeated her remarks.

"You're sure?" he said.

"Of course I'm sure."

"Then why did the arrowroot taste rummy?"

"I made inquiries about that. It seems that mother was worried about your taking to smoking, and she found an advertisement in one of the magazines about the Tobacco Habit Cured in Three Days by a secret method without the victim's knowledge. It was a gentle, safe, agreeable method of eliminating the nicotine poison from the system, strengthening the weakened membranes,

and overcoming the craving; so she put some in your arrowroot every night."

There was a long silence. To Rollo Podmarsh it seemed as though the sun had suddenly begun to shine, the birds to sing, and the grasshoppers to toot. All Nature was one vast substantial smile. Down in the valley by the second hole he caught sight of Wallace Chesney's Plus Fours gleaming as their owner stooped to play his shot, and it seemed to him that he had never in his life seen anything so lovely.

"Mary," he said, in a low, vibrant voice, "will you wait here for me? I want to go into the club-house for a moment."

"To change your wet shoes?"

"No!" thundered Rollo. "I'm never going to change my wet shoes again in my life." He felt in his pocket, and hurled a box of patent pills far into the undergrowth. "But I *am* going to change my winter woollies. And when I've put those dashed barbed-wire entanglements into the club-house furnace, I'm going to phone to old Colonel Bodger. I hear his lumbago's worse than ever. I'm going to fix up a match with him for a shilling a hole. And if I don't lick the boots off him you can break the engagement!"

"My hero!" murmured Mary.

Rollo kissed her, and with long, resolute steps strode to the club-house.

CHAPTER VII

RODNEY FAILS TO QUALIFY

THERE was a sound of revelry by night, for the first Saturday in June had arrived and the Golf Club was holding its monthly dance. Fairy lanterns festooned the branches of the chestnut trees on the terrace above the ninth green, and from the big dining-room, cleared now of its tables and chairs, came a muffled slithering of feet and the plaintive sound of saxophones moaning softly like a man who has just missed a short putt. In a basket-chair in the shadows, the Oldest Member puffed a cigar and listened, well content. His was the peace of the man who has reached the age when he is no longer expected to dance.

A door opened, and a young man came out of the club-house. He stood on the steps with folded arms, gazing to left and right. The Oldest Member, watching him from the darkness, noted that he wore an air of gloom. His brow was furrowed and he had the indefinable look of one who has been smitten in the spiritual solar plexus.

Yes, where all around him was joy, jollity, and song, this young man brooded.

The sound of a high tenor voice, talking rapidly and entertainingly on the subject of modern Russian thought, now intruded itself on the peace of the night. From the farther end of the terrace a girl came into the light of the lantern, her arm in that of a second young man. She was small and pretty, he tall and intellectual. The light shone on his high forehead and glittered on his tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles. The girl was gazing up at him with reverence and adoration, and at the sight of these twain the youth on the steps appeared to undergo some sort of spasm. His face became contorted and he wobbled. Then, with a gesture of sublime despair, he tripped over the mat and stumbled back into the club-house. The couple passed on and disappeared, and the Oldest Member had the night to himself, until the door opened once more and the club's courteous and

efficient secretary trotted down the steps. The scent of the cigar drew him to where the Oldest Member sat, and he dropped into the chair beside him.

"Seen young Ramage tonight?" asked the secretary.

"He was standing on those steps only a moment ago," replied the Oldest Member. "Why do you ask?"

"I thought perhaps you might have had a talk with him and found out what's the matter. Can't think what's come to him tonight. Nice, civil boy as a rule, but just now, when I was trying to tell him about my short approach on the fifth this afternoon, he was positively abrupt. Gave a sort of hollow gasp and dashed away in the middle of a sentence."

The Oldest Member sighed.

"You must overlook his brusqueness," he said. "The poor lad is passing through a trying time. A short while back I was the spectator of a little drama that explains everything. Mabel Patmore is flirting disgracefully with that young fellow Purvis."

"Purvis? Oh, you mean the man who won the club Bowls Championship last week?"

"I can quite believe that he may have disgraced himself in the manner you describe," said the Sage, coldly. "I know he plays that noxious game. And it is for that reason that I hate to see a nice girl like Mabel Patmore, who only needs a little more steadiness off the tee to become a very fair golfer, wasting her time on him. I suppose his attraction lies in the fact that he has a great flow of conversation, while poor Ramage is, one must admit, more or less of a dumb Isaac. Girls are too often snared by a glib tongue. Still, it is a pity, a great pity. The whole affair recalls irresistibly to my mind the story——"

The secretary rose with a whirr like a rocketing pheasant.

"——the story," continued the Sage, "of Jane Packard, William Bates, and Rodney Spelvin—which, as you have never heard it, I will now proceed to relate."

"Can't stop now, much as I should like——"

"It is a theory of mine," proceeded the Oldest Member, attaching himself to the other's coat-tails, and pulling him gently back into his seat, "that nothing but misery can come of the union between a golfer and an outcast whose soul has not been purified by the noblest of games. This is well exemplified by the story of Jane Packard, William Bates, and Rodney Spelvin."

"All sorts of things to look after——"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"That is why I am hoping so sincerely that there is nothing more serious than a temporary flirtation in this business of Mabel Patmore and bowls-playing Purvis. A girl in whose life golf has become a factor, would be mad to trust her happiness to a blister whose idea of enjoyment is trundling wooden balls across a lawn. Sooner or later he is certain to fail her in some crisis. Lucky for her if this failure occurs before the marriage knot has been inextricably tied and so opens her eyes to his inadequacy—as was the case in the matter of Jane Packard, William Bates, and Rodney Spelvin. I will now," said the Oldest Member, "tell you all about Jane Packard, William Bates, and Rodney Spelvin."

The secretary uttered a choking groan.

"I shall miss the next dance," he pleaded.

"A bit of luck for some nice girl," said the Sage, equably.

He tightened his grip on the other's arm.

Jane Packard and William Bates (said the Oldest Member) were not, you must understand, officially engaged. They had grown up together from childhood, and there existed between them a sort of understanding—the understanding being that, if ever William could speed himself up enough to propose, Jane would accept him, and they would settle down and live stodgily and happily ever after. For William was not one of your rapid wooers. In his affair of the heart he moved somewhat slowly and ponderously, like a motor-lorry, an object which both in physique and temperament he greatly resembled. He was an extraordinarily large, powerful, ox-like young man, who required plenty of time to make up his mind about any given problem. I have seen him in the club dining-room musing with a thoughtful frown for fifteen minutes on end while endeavouring to weigh the rival merits of a chump chop and a sirloin steak as a luncheon dish. A placid, leisurely man, I might almost call him lymphatic. *I will* call him lymphatic. He was lymphatic.

The first glimmering of an idea that Jane might possibly be a suitable wife for him had come to William some three years before this story opens. Having brooded on the matter tensely for six months, he then sent her a bunch of roses. In the October of the following year, nothing having occurred to alter his growing conviction that she was an attractive girl, he presented her with a two-pound box of assorted chocolates. And from

THE HEART OF A GOOF

then on his progress, though not rapid, was continuous, and there seemed little reason to doubt that, should nothing come about to weaken Jane's regard for him, another five years or so would see the matter settled.

And it did not appear likely that anything would weaken Jane's regard. They had much in common, for she was a calm, slow-moving person, too. They had a mutual devotion to golf, and played together every day; and the fact that their handicaps were practically level formed a strong bond. Most divorces, as you know, spring from the fact that the husband is too markedly superior to his wife at golf; this leading him, when she starts criticizing his relations, to say bitter and unforgivable things about her mashie-shots. Nothing of this kind could happen with William and Jane. They would build their life on a solid foundation of sympathy and understanding. The years would find them consoling and encouraging each other, happy married lovers. If, that is to say, William ever got round to proposing.

It was not until the fourth year of this romance that I detected the first sign of any alteration in the schedule. I had happened to call on the Packards one afternoon and found them all out except Jane. She gave me tea and conversed for a while, but she seemed distrait. I had known her since she wore rompers, so felt entitled to ask if there was anything wrong.

"Not exactly wrong," said Jane, and she heaved a sigh.

"Tell me," I said.

She heaved another sigh.

"Have you ever read *The Love that Scorches*, by Luella Periton Phipps?" she asked.

I said I had not.

"I got it out of the library yesterday," said Jane, dreamily, "and finished it at three this morning in bed. It is a very, very beautiful book. It is all about the desert and people riding on camels and a wonderful Arab chief with stern, yet tender, eyes, and a girl called Angela, and oases and dates and mirages, and all like that. There is a chapter where the Arab chief seizes the girl and clasps her in his arms and she feels his hot breath searing her face and he flings her on his horse and they ride off and all around was sand and night, and the mysterious stars. And somehow—oh, I don't know——"

She gazed yearningly at the chandelier.

"I wish mother would take me to Algiers next winter," she

THE HEART OF A GOOF

murmured, absently. "It would do her rheumatism so much good."

I went away frankly uneasy. These novelists, I felt, ought to be more careful. They put ideas into girls' heads and made them dissatisfied. I determined to look William up and give him a kindly word of advice. It was no business of mine, you may say, but they were so ideally suited to one another that it seemed a tragedy that anything should come between them. And Jane was in a strange mood. At any moment, I felt, she might take a good, square look at William and wonder what she could ever have seen in him. I hurried to the boy's cottage.

"William," I said, "as one who dandled you on his knee when you were a baby, I wish to ask you a personal question. Answer me this, and make it snappy. Do you love Jane Packard?"

A look of surprise came into his face, followed by one of intense thought. He was silent for a space.

"Who, me?" he said at length.

"Yes, you."

"Jane Packard?"

"Yes, Jane Packard."

"Do I love Jane Packard?" said William, assembling the material and arranging it neatly in his mind.

He pondered for perhaps five minutes.

"Why, of course I do," he said.

"Splendid!"

"Devotedly, dash it!"

"Capital!"

"You might say madly."

I tapped him on his barrel-like chest.

"Then my advice to you, William Bates, is to tell her so."

"Now that's rather a brainy scheme," said William, looking at me admiringly. "I see exactly what you're driving at. You mean it would kind of settle things, and all that?"

"Precisely."

"Well, I've got to go away for a couple of days tomorrow—it's the Invitation Tournament at Squashy Hollow—but I'll be back on Wednesday. Suppose I take her out on the links on Wednesday and propose?"

"A very good idea."

"At the sixth hole, say?"

"At the sixth hole would do excellently."

"Or the seventh?"

"The sixth would be better. The ground slopes from the tee, and you would be hidden from view by the dog-leg turn."

"Something in that."

"My own suggestion would be that you somehow contrive to lead her into that large bunker to the left of the sixth fairway."

"Why?"

"I have reason to believe that Jane would respond more readily to your wooing were it conducted in some vast sandy waste. And there is another thing," I proceeded, earnestly, "which I must impress upon you. See that there is nothing tame or tepid about your behaviour when you propose. You must show zip and romance. In fact, I strongly recommend you, before you even say a word to her, to seize her and clasp her in your arms and let your hot breath sear her face."

"Who, me?" said William.

"Believe me, it is what will appeal to her most."

"But, I say! Hot breath, I mean! Dash it all, you know, what?"

"I assure you it is indispensable."

"Seize her?" said William blankly.

"Precisely."

"Clasp her in my arms?"

"Just so."

William plunged into silent thought once more.

"Well, you *know*, I suppose," he said at length. "You've had experience, I take it. Still—— Oh, all right, I'll have a stab at it."

"There spoke the true William Bates!" I said. "Go to it, lad, and Heaven speed your wooing!"

In all human schemes—and it is this that so often brings failure to the subtlest strategists—there is always the chance of the Unknown Factor popping up, that unforeseen X for which we have made no allowance and which throws our whole plan of campaign out of gear. I had not anticipated anything of the kind coming along to mar the arrangements on the present occasion; but when I reached the first tee on the Wednesday afternoon to give William Bates that last word of encouragement, which means so much, I saw that I had been too sanguine.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

William had not yet arrived, but Jane was there, and with her a tall, slim, dark-haired, sickeningly romantic-looking youth in faultlessly fitting serge. A stranger to me. He was talking to her in a musical undertone, and she seemed to be hanging on his words. Her beautiful eyes were fixed on his face, and her lips slightly parted. So absorbed was she that it was not until I spoke that she became aware of my presence.

"William not arrived yet?"

She turned with a start.

"William? Hasn't he? Oh! No, not yet. I don't suppose he will be long. I want to introduce you to Mr. Spelvin. He has come to stay with the Wyndhams for a few weeks. He is going to walk round with us."

Naturally this information came as a shock to me, but I masked my feelings and greeted the young man with a well-assumed cordiality.

"Mr. George Spelvin, the actor?" I asked, shaking hands.

"My cousin," he said. "My name is Rodney Spelvin. I do not share George's histrionic ambitions. If I have any claim to—may I say renown?—it is as a maker of harmonies."

"A composer, eh?"

"Verbal harmonies," explained Mr. Spelvin. "I am, in my humble fashion, a poet."

"He writes the most beautiful poetry," said Jane, warmly. "He has just been reciting some of it to me."

"Oh, that little thing?" said Mr. Spelvin, deprecatingly. "A mere *morceau*. One of my juvenilia."

"It was too beautiful for words," persisted Jane.

"Ah, you," said Mr. Spelvin, "have the soul to appreciate it. I could wish that there were more like you, Miss Packard. We singers have much to put up with in a crass and materialistic world. Only last week a man, a coarse editor, asked me what my sonnet, 'Wine of Desire', *meant*." He laughed indulgently. "I gave him answer, 'twas a sonnet, not a mining prospectus."

"It would have served him right," said Jane, heatedly, "if you had pasted him one on the nose!"

At this point a low whistle behind me attracted my attention, and I turned to perceive William Bates towering against the skyline.

"Hoy!" said William.

I walked to where he stood, leaving Jane and Mr. Spelvin in earnest conversation with their heads close together.

"I say," said William, in a rumbling undertone, "who's the bird with Jane?"

"A man named Spelvin. He is visiting the Wyndhams. I suppose Mrs. Wyndham made them acquainted."

"Looks a bit of a Gawd-help-us," said William critically.

"He is going to walk round with you."

It was impossible for a man of William Bates's temperament to start, but his face took on a look of faint concern.

"Walk round with us?"

"So Jane said."

"But look here," said William. "I can't possibly seize her and clasp her in my arms and do all that hot-breath stuff with this pie-faced exhibit hanging round on the outskirts."

"No, I fear not."

"Postpone it, then, what?" said William, with unmistakable relief. "Well, as a matter of fact, it's probably a good thing. There was a most extraordinarily fine steak-and-kidney pudding at lunch, and, between ourselves, I'm not feeling what you might call keyed up to anything in the nature of a romantic scene. Some other time, eh?"

I looked at Jane and the Spelvin youth, and a nameless apprehension swept over me. There was something in their attitude which I found alarming. I was just about to whisper a warning to William not to treat this new arrival too lightly, when Jane caught sight of him and called him over and a moment later they set out on their round.

I walked away pensively. This Spelvin's advent, coming immediately on top of that book of desert love, was undeniably sinister. My heart sank for William, and I waited at the clubhouse to have a word with him, after his match. He came in two hours later, flushed and jubilant.

"Played the game of my life!" he said. "We didn't hole out all the putts, but, making allowance for everything, you can chalk me up an eighty-three. Not so bad, eh? You know the eighth hole? Well, I was a bit short with my drive, and found my ball lying badly for the brassie, so I took my driving-iron and with a nice easy swing let the pill have it so squarely on the seat of the pants that it flew——"

"Where is Jane?" I interrupted.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Jane? Oh, the bloke Spelvin has taken her home."

"Beware of him, William!" I whispered, tensely. "Have a care, young Bates! If you don't look out, you'll have him stealing Jane from you. Don't laugh. Remember that I saw them together before you arrived. She was gazing into his eyes as a desert maiden might gaze into the eyes of a sheik. You don't seem to realize, wretched William Bates, that Jane is an extremely romantic girl. A fascinating stranger like this, coming suddenly into her life, may well snatch her away from you before you know where you are."

"That's all right," said William, lightly. "I don't mind admitting that the same idea occurred to me. But I made judicious inquiries on the way round, and found out that the fellow's a poet. You don't seriously expect me to believe that there's any chance of Jane falling in love with a poet?"

He spoke incredulously, for there were three things in the world that he held in the smallest esteem—slugs, poets, and caddies with hiccups.

"I think it extremely possible, if not probable," I replied.

"Nonsense!" said William. "And, besides, the man doesn't play golf. Never had a club in his hand, and says he never wants to. That's the sort of fellow he is."

At this, I confess, I did experience a distinct feeling of relief. I could imagine Jane Packard, stimulated by exotic literature, committing many follies, but I was compelled to own that I could not conceive of her giving her heart to one who not only did not play golf but had no desire to play it. Such a man, to a girl of her fine nature and correct upbringing, would be beyond the pale. I walked home with William in a calm and happy frame of mind.

I was to learn but one short week later that Woman is the unfathomable, incalculable mystery, the problem we men can never hope to solve.

The week that followed was one of much festivity in our village. There were dances, picnics, bathing-parties, and all the other adjuncts of high summer. In these William Bates played but a minor part. Dancing was not one of his gifts. He swung, if called upon, an amiable shoe, but the disposition in the neighbourhood was to refrain from calling upon him; for he had an incurable habit of coming down with his full weight upon his

partner's toes, and many a fair girl had had to lie up for a couple of days after collaborating with him in a fox-trot.

Picnics, again, bored him, and he always preferred a round on the links to the merriest bathing-party. The consequence was that he kept practically aloof from the revels, and all through the week Jane Packard was squired by Rodney Spelvin. With Spelvin she swayed over the waxed floor; with Spelvin she dived and swam; and it was Spelvin who, with zealous hand, brushed ants off her mayonnaise and squashed wasps with a chivalrous teaspoon. The end was inevitable. Apart from anything else, the moon was at its full and many of these picnics were held at night. And you know what that means. It was about ten days later that William Bates came to me in my little garden with an expression on his face like a man who didn't know it was loaded.

"I say," said William, "you busy?"

I emptied the remainder of the water-can on the lobelias, and was at his disposal.

"I say," said William, "rather a rotten thing has happened. You know Jane?"

I said I knew Jane.

"You know Spelvin?"

I said I knew Spelvin.

"Well, Jane's gone and got engaged to him," said William, aggrieved.

"What?"

"It's a fact."

"Already?"

"Absolutely. She told me this morning, And what I want to know," said the stricken boy, sitting down thoroughly unnerved on a basket of strawberries, "is, where do I get off?"

My heart bled for him, but I could not help reminding him that I had anticipated this.

"You should not have left them so much alone together," I said. "You must have known that there is nothing more conducive to love than the moon in June. Why, songs have been written about it. In fact, I cannot at the moment recall a song that has not been written about it."

"Yes, but how was I to guess that anything like this would happen?" cried William, rising and scraping strawberries off his person. "Who would ever have supposed Jane

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Packard would leap off the dock with a fellow who doesn't play golf?"

"Certainly, as you say, it seems almost incredible. You are sure you heard her correctly? When she told you about the engagement, I mean. There was no chance that you could have misunderstood?"

"Not a bit of it. As a matter of fact, what led up to the thing, if you know what I mean, was me proposing to her myself. I'd been thinking a lot during the last ten days over what you said to me about that, and the more I thought of it the more of a sound egg the notion seemed. So I got her alone up at the club-house and said, 'I say, old girl, what about it?' and she said, 'What about what?' and I said, 'What about marrying me? Don't if you don't want to, of course,' I said, 'but I'm bound to say it looks pretty good to me.' And then she said she loved another—this bloke Spelvin, to wit. A nasty jar, I can tell you, it was. I was just starting off on a round, and it made me hook my putts on every green."

"But did she say specifically that she was engaged to Spelvin?"

"She said she loved him."

"There may be hope. If she is not irrevocably engaged the fancy may pass. I think I will go and see Jane and make tactful inquiries."

"I wish you would," said William. "And, I say, you haven't any stuff that'll take strawberry-juice off a fellow's trousers, have you?"

My interview with Jane that evening served only to confirm the bad news. Yes, she was definitely engaged to the man Spelvin. In a burst of girlish confidence she told me some of the details of the affair.

"The moon was shining and a soft breeze played in the trees," she said. "And suddenly he took me in his arms, gazed deep into my eyes, and cried, 'I love you! I worship you! I adore you! You are the tree on which the fruit of my life hangs; my mate; my woman; predestined to me since the first star shone up in yonder sky!'"

"Nothing," I agreed, "could be fairer than that. And then?" I said, thinking how different it all must have been from William Bates's miserable, limping proposal.

"Then we fixed it up that we would get married in September."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"You are sure you are doing wisely?" I ventured.

Her eyes opened.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, you know, whatever his other merits—and no doubt they are numerous—Rodney Spelvin does *not* play golf."

"No, but he's very broad-minded about it."

I shuddered. Women say these things so lightly.

"Broad-minded?"

"Yes. He has no objection to my going on playing. He says he likes my pretty enthusiasms."

There seemed nothing more to say on that subject.

"Well," I said, "I am sure I wish you every happiness. I had hoped, of course—but never mind that."

"What?"

"I had hoped, as you insist on my saying it, that you and William Bates——"

A shadow passed over her face. Her eyes grew sad.

"Poor William! I'm awfully sorry about that. He's a dear."

"A splendid fellow," I agreed.

"He has been so wonderful about the whole thing. So many men would have gone off and shot grizzly bears or something. But William just said 'Right-o!' in a quiet voice, and he's going to caddy for me at Mossy Heath next week."

"There is good stuff in the boy."

"Yes." She sighed. "If it wasn't for Rodney—— Oh, well!"

I thought it would be tactful to change the subject.

"So you have decided to go to Mossy Heath again?"

"Yes. And I'm really going to qualify this year."

The annual Invitation Tournament at Mossy Heath was one of the most important fixtures of our local female golfing year. As is usual with these affairs, it began with a medal-play qualifying round, the thirty-two players with the lowest net scores then proceeding to fight it out during the remainder of the week by match-play. It gratified me to hear Jane speak so confidently of her chances, for this was the fourth year she had entered, and each time, though she had started out with the brightest prospects, she had failed to survive the qualifying round. Like so many golfers, she was fifty per cent. better at match-play

THE HEART OF A GOOF

than at medal-play. Mossy Heath, being a championship course, is full of nasty pitfalls, and on each of the three occasions on which she had tackled it one very bad hole had undone all her steady work on the other seventeen and ruined her card. I was delighted to find her so undismayed by failure.

"I am sure you will," I said. "Just play your usual careful game."

"It doesn't matter what sort of a game I play this time," said Jane, jubilantly. "I've just heard that there are only thirty-two entries this year, so that everybody who finishes is bound to qualify. I have simply got to get round somehow, and there I am."

"It would seem somewhat superfluous in these circumstances to play a qualifying round at all."

"Oh, but they must. You see, there are prizes for the best three scores, so they have to play it. But isn't it a relief to know that, even if I come to grief on that beastly seventh, as I did last year, I shall still be all right?"

"It is, indeed. I have a feeling that once it becomes a matter of match-play you will be irresistible."

"I do hope so. It would be lovely to win with Rodney looking on."

"Will he be looking on?"

"Yes. He's going to walk round with me. Isn't it sweet of him?"

Her *fiancé's* name having slid into the conversation again, she seemed inclined to become eloquent about him. I left her, however, before she could begin. To one so strongly pro-William as myself, eulogistic prattle about Rodney Spelvin was repugnant. I disapproved entirely of this infatuation of hers. I am not a narrow-minded man; I quite appreciate the fact that non-golfers are entitled to marry; but I could not countenance their marrying potential winners of the Ladies' Invitation Tournament at Mossy Heath.

The Greens Committee, as greens committees are so apt to do in order to justify their existence, have altered the Mossy Heath course considerably since the time of which I am speaking, but they have left the three most poisonous holes untouched. I refer to the fourth, the seventh, and the fifteenth. Even a soulless Greens Committee seems to have realized that golfers, long-suffering though they are, can be pushed too far, and that the

addition of even a single extra bunker to any of these dreadful places would probably lead to armed riots in the club-house.

Jane Packard had done well on the first three holes, but as she stood on the fourth tee she was conscious, despite the fact that this seemed to be one of her good days, of a certain nervousness; and oddly enough, great as was her love for Rodney Spelvin, it was not his presence that gave her courage, but the sight of William Bates's large, friendly face and the sound of his pleasant voice urging her to keep her bean down and refrain from pressing.

As a matter of fact, to be perfectly truthful, there was beginning already to germinate within her by this time a faint but definite regret that Rodney Spelvin had decided to accompany her on this qualifying round. It was sweet of him to bother to come, no doubt, but still there was something about Rodney that did not seem to blend with the holy atmosphere of a championship course. He was the one romance of her life and their souls were bound together for all eternity, but the fact remained that he did not appear to be able to keep still while she was making her shots, and his light humming, musical though it was, militated against accuracy on the green. He was humming now as she addressed her ball, and for an instant a spasm of irritation shot through her. She fought it down bravely and concentrated on her drive, and when the ball soared over the cross-bunker she forgot her annoyance. There is nothing so mellowing, so conducive to sweet and genial thoughts, as a real juicy one straight down the middle, and this was a pipterino.

"Nice work," said William Bates, approvingly.

Jane gave him a grateful smile and turned to Rodney. It was his appreciation that she wanted. He was not a golfer, but even he must be able to see that her drive had been something out of the common.

Rodney Spelvin was standing with his back turned, gazing out over the rolling prospect, one hand shading his eyes.

"That vista there," said Rodney. "That calm, wooded hollow, bathed in the golden sunshine. It reminds me of the island valley of Avilion——"

"Did you see my drive, Rodney?"

"——where falls not rain nor hail nor any snow, nor ever wind blows loudly. Eh? Your drive? No, I didn't."

Again Jane Packard was aware of that faint, wistful regret. But this was swept away a few moments later in the ecstasy of

THE HEART OF A GOOF

a perfect iron-shot which plunked her ball nicely on to the green. The last time she had played this hole she had taken seven, for all round the plateau green are sinister sand-bunkers, each beckoning the ball into its hideous depths; and now she was on in two and life was very sweet. Putting was her strong point, so that there was no reason why she should not get a snappy four on one of the nastiest holes on the course. She glowed with a strange emotion as she took her putter, and as she bent over her ball the air seemed filled with soft music.

It was only when she started to concentrate on the line of her putt that this soft music began to bother her. Then, listening, she became aware that it proceeded from Rodney Spelvin. He was standing immediately behind her, humming an old French love-song. It was the sort of old French love-song to which she could have listened for hours in some scented garden under the young May moon, but on the green of the fourth at Mossy Heath it got right in amongst her nerve-centres.

"Rodney, *please!*"

"Eh?"

Jane found herself wishing that Rodney Spelvin would not say "Eh?" whenever she spoke to him.

"Do you mind not humming?" said Jane. "I want to putt."

"Putt on, child, putt on," said Rodney Spelvin, indulgently. "I don't know what you mean, but, if it makes you happy to putt, putt to your heart's content."

Jane bent over her ball again. She had got the line now. She brought back her putter with infinite care.

"My God!" exclaimed Rodney Spelvin, going off like a bomb.

Jane's ball, sharply jabbed, shot past the hole and rolled on about three yards. She spun round in anguish. Rodney Spelvin was pointing at the horizon.

"*What* a bit of colour!" he cried. "Did you ever see such a bit of colour?"

"Oh, Rodney!" moaned Jane.

"Eh?"

Jane gulped and walked to her ball. Her fourth putt trickled into the hole.

"Did you win?" said Rodney Spelvin, amiably.

Jane walked to the fifth tee in silence.

The fifth and sixth holes at Mossy Heath are long, but they

offer little trouble to those who are able to keep straight. It is as if the architect of the course had relaxed over these two in order to ensure that his malignant mind should be at its freshest and keenest when he came to design the pestilential seventh. This seventh, as you may remember, is the hole at which Sandy McHoots, then Open Champion, took an eleven on an important occasion. It is a short hole, and a full mashie will take you nicely on to the green, provided you can carry the river that frolics just beyond the tee and seems to plead with you to throw it a ball to play with. Once on the green, however, the problem is to stay there. The green itself is about the size of a drawing-room carpet, and in the summer, when the ground is hard, a ball that has not the maximum of back-spin is apt to touch lightly and bound off into the river beyond; for this is an island green, where the stream bends like a serpent. I refresh your memory with these facts in order that you may appreciate to the full what Jane Packard was up against.

The woman with whom Jane was partnered had the honour, and drove a nice high ball which fell into one of the bunkers to the left. She was a silent, patient-looking woman, and she seemed to regard this as perfectly satisfactory. She withdrew from the tee and made way for Jane.

"Nice work!" said William Bates, a moment later. For Jane's ball, soaring in a perfect arc, was dropping, it seemed on the very pin.

"Oh, Rodney, look!" cried Jane.

"Eh?" said Rodney Spelvin.

His remark was drowned in a passionate squeal of agony from his betrothed. The most poignant of all tragedies had occurred. The ball, touching the green, leaped like a young lamb, scuttled past the pin, and took a running dive over the cliff.

There was a silence. Jane's partner, who was seated on the bench by the sand-box reading a pocket edition in limp leather of Vardon's *What Every Young Golfer Should Know*, with which she had been refreshing herself at odd moments all through the round, had not observed the incident. William Bates, with the tact of a true golfer, refrained from comment. Jane was herself swallowing painfully. It was left to Rodney Spelvin to break the silence.

"Good!" he said.

Jane Packard turned like a stepped-on worm.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"What do you mean, good?"

"You hit your ball farther than she did."

"I sent it into the river," said Jane, in a low, toneless voice.

"Capital!" said Rodney Spelvin, delicately masking a yawn with two fingers of his shapely right hand. "Capital! Capital!"

Her face contorted with pain, Jane put down another ball.

"Playing three," she said.

The student of Vardon marked the place in her book with her thumb, looked up, nodded, and resumed her reading.

"Nice w——" began William Bates, as the ball soared off the tee, and checked himself abruptly. Already he could see that the unfortunate girl had put too little beef into it. The ball was falling, falling. It fell. A crystal fountain flashed up towards the sun. The ball lay floating on the bosom of the stream, only some few feet short of the island. But, as has been well pointed out, that little less and how far away!

"Playing five!" said Jane, between her teeth.

"What," inquired Rodney Spelvin, chattily, lighting a cigarette, "is the record break?"

"Playing *five*," said Jane, with a dreadful calm, and gripped her mashie.

"Half a second," said William Bates, suddenly. "I say, I believe you could play that last one from where it floats. A good crisp slosh with a niblick would put you on, and you'd be there in four, with a chance for a five. Worth trying, what? I mean, no sense in dropping strokes unless you have to."

Jane's eyes were gleaming. She threw William a look of infinite gratitude.

"Why, I believe I could!"

"Worth having a dash."

"There's a boat down there!"

"I could row," said William.

"I could stand in the middle and slosh," cried Jane.

"And what's-his-name—*that*," said William, jerking his head in the direction of Rodney Spelvin, who was strolling up and down behind the tee, humming a gay Venetian barcarolle, "could steer."

"William," said Jane, fervently, "you're a darling."

"Oh, I don't know," said William, modestly.

"There's no one like you in the world. Rodney!"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Eh?" said Rodney Spelvin.

"We're going out in that boat. I want you to steer."

Rodney Spelvin's face showed appreciation of the change of programme. Golf bored him, but what could be nicer than a gentle row in a boat.

"Capital!" he said. "Capital! Capital!"

There was a dreamy look in Rodney Spelvin's eyes as he leaned back with the tiller-ropes in his hands. This was just his idea of the proper way of passing a summer afternoon. Drifting lazily over the silver surface of the stream. His eyes closed. He began to murmur softly:

"All today the slow sleek ripples hardly bear up shoreward,
Charged with sighs more light than laughter, faint and fair,
Like a woodland lake's weak wavelets lightly lingering forward,
Soft and listless as the—— Here! Hi!"

For at this moment the silver surface of the stream was violently split by a vigorously-wielded niblick, the boat lurched drunkenly, and over his Panama-hatted head and down his grey-flannelled torso there descended a cascade of water.

"Here! Hi!" cried Rodney Spelvin.

He cleared his eyes and gazed reproachfully. Jane and William Bates were peering into the depths.

"I missed it," said Jane.

"There she spouts!" said William, pointing. "Ready?"

Jane raised her niblick.

"Here! Hi!" bleated Rodney Spelvin, as a second cascade poured damply over him.

He shook the drops off his face, and perceived that Jane was regarding him with hostility.

"I do wish you wouldn't talk just as I am swinging," she said, pettishly. "Now you've made me miss it again! If you can't keep quiet, I wish you wouldn't insist on coming round with one. Can you see it, William?"

"There she blows," said William Bates.

"Here! You aren't going to do it *again*, are you?" cried Rodney Spelvin.

Jane bared her teeth.

"I'm going to get that ball on to the green if I have to stay here all night," she said.

Rodney Spelvin looked at her and shuddered. Was this the quiet, dreamy girl he had loved? This Mænad? Her hair was

lying in damp wisps about her face, her eyes were shining with an unearthly light.

"No, but really——" he faltered.

Jane stamped her foot.

"What *are* you making all this fuss about, Rodney?" she snapped. "Where is it, William?"

"There she dips," said William. "Playing six."

"Playing six."

"Let her go," said William.

"Let her go it is!" said Jane.

A perfect understanding seemed to prevail between these two.

Splash!

The woman on the bank looked up from her Vardon as Rodney Spelvin's agonized scream rent the air. She saw a boat upon the water, a man rowing the boat, another man, hatless, gesticulating in the stern, a girl beating the water with a niblick. She nodded placidly and understandingly. A niblick was the club she would have used herself in such circumstances. Everything appeared to her entirely regular and orthodox. She resumed her book.

Splash!

"Playing fifteen," said Jane.

"Fifteen is right," said William Bates.

Splash! Splash! Splash!

"Playing forty-four."

"Forty-four is correct."

Splash! Splash! Splash! Splash!

"Eighty-three?" said Jane, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

"No. Only eighty-two," said William Bates.

"Where is it?"

"There she drifts."

A dripping figure rose violently in the stern of the boat, spouting water like a public fountain. For what seemed to him like an eternity Rodney Spelvin had ducked and spluttered and writhed, and now it came to him abruptly that he was through. He bounded from his seat, and at the same time Jane swung with all the force of her supple body. There was a splash beside which all the other splashes had been as nothing. The boat overturned and went drifting away. Three bodies plunged into the stream. Three heads emerged from the water.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

The woman on the bank looked absently in their direction. Then she resumed her book.

"It's all right," said William Bates, contentedly. "We're in our depth."

"My bag!" cried Jane. "My bag of clubs!"

"Must have sunk," said William.

"Rodney," said Jane, "my bag of clubs is at the bottom somewhere. Dive under and swim about and try to find it."

"It's bound to be around somewhere," said William Bates encouragingly.

Rodney Spelvin drew himself up to his full height. It was not an easy thing to do, for it was muddy where he stood, but he did it.

"Damn your bag of clubs!" he bellowed, lost to all shame. "I'm going home!"

With painful steps, tripping from time to time and vanishing beneath the surface, he sloshed to the shore. For a moment he paused on the bank, silhouetted against the summer sky, then he was gone.

Jane Packard and William Bates watched him go with amazed eyes.

"I never would have dreamed," said Jane, dazedly, "that he was that sort of man."

"A bad lot," said William Bates.

"The sort of man to be upset by the merest trifle!"

"Must have a naturally bad disposition," said William Bates.

"Why, if a little thing like this could make him so rude and brutal and horrid, it wouldn't be *safe* to marry him!"

"Taking a big chance," agreed William Bates. "Sort of fellow who would water the cat's milk and kick the baby in the face." He took a deep breath and disappeared. "Here are your clubs, old girl," he said, coming to the surface again. "Only wanted a bit of looking for."

"Oh, William," said Jane, "you are the most wonderful man on earth!"

"Would you go as far as that?" said William.

"I was mad, mad, ever to get engaged to that brute!"

"Now there," said William Bates, removing an eel from his left breast-pocket, "I'm absolutely with you. Thought so all along, but didn't like to say so. What I mean is, a girl like you

THE HEART OF A GOOF

—keen on golf and all that sort of thing—ought to marry a chap like me—keen on golf and everything of that description.”

“William,” cried Jane, passionately, detaching a newt from her right ear, “I will!”

“Silly nonsense, when you come right down to it, your marrying a fellow who doesn’t play golf. Nothing in it.”

“I’ll break off the engagement the moment I get home.”

“You couldn’t make a sounder move, old girl.”

“William!”

“Jane!”

The woman on the bank, glancing up as she turned a page, saw a man and a girl embracing, up to their waists in water. It seemed to have nothing to do with her. She resumed her book.

Jane looked lovingly into William’s eyes.

“William,” she said, “I think I have loved you all my life.”

“Jane,” said William, “I’m dashed sure I’ve loved *you* all *my* life. Meant to tell you so a dozen times, but something always seemed to come up.”

“William,” said Jane, “you’re an angel and a darling. Where’s the ball?”

“There she pops.”

“Playing eighty-four?”

“Eighty-four it is,” said William. “Slow back, keep your eye on the ball, and don’t press.”

The woman on the bank began Chapter Twenty-five.

CHAPTER VIII

JANE GETS OFF THE FAIR WAY

THE side-door leading into the smoking-room opened, and the golf-club's popular and energetic secretary came trotting down the steps on to the terrace above the ninth green. As he reached the gravel, a wandering puff of wind blew the door to with a sharp report, and the Oldest Member, who had been dozing in a chair over his *Wodehouse on the Niblick*, unclosed his eyes, blinking in the strong light. He perceived the secretary skimming to and fro like a questing dog.

"You have lost something?" he inquired, courteously.

"Yes, a book. I wish," said the secretary, annoyed, "that people would leave things alone. You haven't seen a novel called *The Man with the Missing Eyeball* anywhere about, have you? I'll swear I left it on one of these seats when I went in to lunch."

"You are better without it," said the Sage, with a touch of austerity. "I do not approve of these trashy works of fiction. How much more profitably would your time be spent in mastering the contents of such a volume as I hold in my hand. This is the real literature."

The secretary drew nearer, peering discontentedly about him; and as he approached the Oldest Member sniffed inquiringly.

"What," he said, "is that odour of——? Ah, I see that you are wearing them in your buttonhole. White violets," he murmured. "White violets. Dear me!"

The secretary smirked.

"A girl gave them to me," he said, coyly. "Nice, aren't they?" He squinted down complacently at the flowers, thus missing a sudden sinister gleam in the Oldest Member's eye—a gleam which, had he been on his guard, would have sent him scudding over the horizon; for it was the gleam which told that the Sage had been reminded of a story.

"White violets," said the Oldest Member, in a meditative voice. "A curious coincidence that you should be wearing white violets and looking for a work of fiction. The combination brings irresistibly to my mind——"

Realizing his peril too late, the secretary started violently. A gentle hand urged him into the adjoining chair.

"——the story," proceeded the Oldest Member, "of William Bates, Jane Packard, and Rodney Spelvin."

The secretary drew a deep breath of relief and the careworn look left his face.

"It's all right," he said, briskly. "You told me that one only the other day. I remember every word of it. Jane Packard got engaged to Rodney Spelvin, the poet, but her better feelings prevailed in time, and she broke it off and married Bates, who was a golfer. I recall the whole thing distinctly. This man Bates was an unromantic sort of chap, but he loved Jane Packard devotedly. Bless my soul, how it all comes back to me! No need to tell it me at all."

"What I am about to relate now," said the Sage, tightening his grip on the other's coat-sleeve, "is another story about William Bates, Jane Packard, and Rodney Spelvin."

Inasmuch (said the Oldest Member) as you have not forgotten the events leading up to the marriage of William Bates and Jane Packard, I will not repeat them. All I need say is that that curious spasm of romantic sentiment which had caused Jane to fall temporarily under the spell of a man who was not only a poet but actually a non-golfer appeared to have passed completely away, leaving no trace behind. From the day she broke off her engagement to Spelvin and plighted her troth to young Bates, nothing could have been more eminently sane and satisfactory than her behaviour. She seemed entirely her old self once more. Two hours after William had led her down the aisle, she and he were out on the links, playing off the final of the Mixed Foursomes, which—and we all thought it the best of omens for their married happiness—they won hands down. A deputation of all that was best and fairest in the village then escorted them to the station to see them off on their honeymoon, which was to be spent in a series of visits to well-known courses throughout the country.

Before the train left, I took young William aside for a moment.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

I had known both him and Jane since childhood, and the success of their union was very near my heart.

"William," I said, "a word with you."

"Make it snappy," said William.

"You have learned by this time," I said, "that there is a strong romantic streak in Jane. It may not appear on the surface, but it is there. And this romantic streak will cause her, like so many wives, to attach an exaggerated importance to what may seem to you trivial things. She will expect from her husband not only love and a constant tender solicitude——"

"Speed it up," urged William.

"What I am trying to say is that, after the habit of wives, she will expect you to remember each year the anniversary of your wedding day, and will be madder than a wet hen if you forget it."

"That's all right. I thought of that myself."

"It is not all right," I insisted. "Unless you take the most earnest precautions, you are absolutely certain to forget. A year from now you will come down to breakfast, and Jane will say to you, 'Do you know what day it is today?' and you will answer 'Tuesday' and reach for the ham and eggs, thus inflicting on her gentle heart a wound from which it will not readily recover."

"Nothing like it," said William, with extraordinary confidence. "I've got a system calculated to beat the game every time. You know how fond Jane is of white violets?"

"Is she?"

"She loves 'em. The bloke Spelvin used to give her a bunch every day. That's how I got the idea. Nothing like learning the shots from your opponent. I've arranged with a florist that a bunch of white violets is to be shipped to Jane every year on this day. I paid five years in advance. I am, therefore, speaking in the most conservative spirit, on velvet. Even if I forget the day, the violets will be there to remind me. I've looked at it from every angle, and I don't see how it can fail. Tell me frankly, is the scheme a wam or is it not?"

"A most excellent plan," I said, relieved. And the next moment the train came in. I left the station with my mind at rest. It seemed to me that the only possible obstacle to the complete felicity of the young couple had been removed.

Jane and William returned in due season from their honey-

moon, and settled down to the normal life of a healthy young couple. Each day they did their round in the morning and their two rounds in the afternoon, and after dinner they would sit hand in hand in the peaceful dusk, reminding one another of the best shots they had brought off at the various holes. Jane would describe to William how she got out of the bunker on the fifth, and William would describe to Jane the low raking wind-cheater he did on the seventh, and then for a moment they would fall into that blissful silence which only true lovers know, until William, illustrating his remarks with a walking-stick, would show Jane how he did that pin-splitter with the mashie on the sixteenth. An ideally happy union, one would have said.

But all the while a little cloud was gathering. As the anniversary of their wedding day approached, a fear began to creep into Jane's heart that William was going to forget it. The perfect husband does not wait till the dawning of the actual day to introduce the anniversary *motif* into his conversation. As long as a week in advance he is apt to say, dreamily, "About this time a year ago I was getting the old silk hat polished up for the wedding," or "Just about now, a year ago, they sent home the sponge-bag trousers, as worn, and I tried them on in front of the looking-glass." But William said none of these things. Not even on the night before the all-important date did he make any allusion to it, and it was with a dull feeling of foreboding that Jane came down to breakfast next morning.

She was first at the table, and was pouring out the coffee when William entered. He opened the morning paper and started to peruse its contents in silence. Not a yip did he let out of him to the effect that this was the maddest, merriest day of all the glad new year.

"William," said Jane.

"Hullo?"

"William," said Jane, and her voice trembled a little, "what day is it today?"

William looked at her over the paper, surprised.

"Wednesday, old girl," he replied. "Don't you remember that yesterday was Tuesday? Shocking memory you've got."

He then reached out for the sausages and bacon and resumed his reading.

"Jane," he said, suddenly. "Jane, old girl, there's something I want to tell you."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Yes?" said Jane, her heart beginning to flutter.

"Something important."

"Yes?"

"It's about these sausages. They are the very best," said William, earnestly, "that I have ever bitten. Where did you get them?"

"From Brownlow."

"Stick to him," said William.

Jane rose from the table and wandered out into the garden. The sun shone gaily, but for her the day was bleak and cold. That William loved her she did not doubt. But that streak of romance in her demanded something more than mere placid love. And when she realized that the poor mutt with whom she had linked her lot had forgotten the anniversary of their wedding day first crack out of the box, her woman's heart was so wounded that for two pins she could have beamed him with a brick.

It was while she was still brooding in this hostile fashion that she perceived the postman coming up the garden. She went to meet him, and was handed a couple of circulars and a mysterious parcel. She broke the string, and behold! a cardboard box containing white violets.

Jane was surprised. Who could be sending her white violets? No message accompanied them. There was no clue whatever to their origin. Even the name of the florist had been omitted.

"Now, who——?" mused Jane, and suddenly started as if she had received a blow. Rodney Spelvin! Yes, it must be he. How many a bunch of white violets had he given her in the brief course of their engagement! This was his poetic way of showing her that he had not forgotten. All was over between them, she had handed him his hat and given him the air, but he still remembered.

Jane was a good and dutiful wife. She loved her William, and no others need apply. Nevertheless, she was a woman. She looked about her cautiously. There was nobody in sight. She streaked up to her room and put the violets in water. And that night, before she went to bed, she gazed at them for several minutes with eyes that were a little moist. Poor Rodney! He could be nothing to her now, of course, but a dear lost friend; but he had been a good old scout in his day.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

It is not my purpose to weary you with repetitious detail in this narrative. I will, therefore, merely state that the next year and the next year and the year after that precisely the same thing took place in the Bateses' home. Punctually every September the seventh William placidly forgot, and punctually every September the seventh the sender of the violets remembered. It was about a month after the fifth anniversary, when William had got his handicap down to nine and little Braid Vardon Bates, their only child, had celebrated his fourth birthday, that Rodney Spelvin, who had hitherto confined himself to poetry, broke out in a new place and inflicted upon the citizenry a novel entitled *The Purple Fan*.

I saw the announcement of the publication in the papers; but beyond a passing resolve that nothing would induce me to read the thing I thought no more of the matter. It is always thus with life's really significant happenings. Fate sneaks its deadliest wallops in on us with such seeming nonchalance. How could I guess what that book was to do to the married happiness of Jane and William Bates?

In deciding not to read *The Purple Fan* I had, I was to discover, over-estimated my powers of resistance. Rodney Spelvin's novel turned out to be one of those things which it is impossible not to read. Within a week of its appearance it had begun to go through the country like Spanish influenza; and, much as I desired to avoid it, a perusal was forced on me by sheer weight of mass-thinking. Every paper that I picked up contained reviews of the book, references to it, letters from the clergy denouncing it; and when I read that three hundred and sixteen mothers had signed a petition to the authorities to have it suppressed, I was reluctantly compelled to spring the necessary cash and purchase a copy.

I had not expected to enjoy it, and I did not. Written in the neodecadent style, which is so popular nowadays, its preciosity offended me; and I particularly objected to its heroine, a young woman of a type which, if met in real life, only ingrained chivalry could have prevented a normal man from kicking extremely hard. Having skimmed through it, I gave my copy to the man who came to inspect the drains. If I had any feeling about the thing, it was a reflection that, if Rodney Spelvin had had to get a novel out of his system, this was just the sort of novel he was bound to write. I remember experiencing a thankfulness

that he had gone so entirely out of Jane's life. How little I knew!

Jane, like every other woman in the village, had bought her copy of *The Purple Fan*. She read it surreptitiously, keeping it concealed, when not in use, beneath a cushion on the Chesterfield. It was not its general tone that caused her to do this, but rather the subconscious feeling that she, a good wife, ought not to be deriving quite so much enjoyment from the work of a man who had occupied for a time such a romantic place in her life.

For Jane, unlike myself, adored the book. Eulalie French, its heroine, whose appeal I had so missed, seemed to her the most fascinating creature she had ever encountered.

She had read the thing through six times when, going up to town one day to do some shopping, she ran into Rodney Spelvin. They found themselves standing side by side on the pavement, waiting for the traffic to pass.

"Rodney!" gasped Jane.

It was a difficult moment for Rodney Spelvin. Five years had passed since he had last seen Jane, and in those five years so many delightful creatures had made a fuss of him that the memory of the girl to whom he had once been engaged for a few weeks had become a little blurred. In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, he had forgotten Jane altogether. The fact that she had addressed him by his first name seemed to argue that they must have met at some time somewhere; but, though he strained his brain, absolutely nothing stirred.

The situation was one that might have embarrassed another man, but Rodney Spelvin was a quick thinker. He saw at a glance that Jane was an extremely pretty girl, and it was his guiding rule in life never to let anything like that get past him. So he clasped her hand warmly, allowed an expression of amazed delight to sweep over his face, and gazed tensely into her eyes.

"You!" he murmured, playing it safe. "You, little one!"

Jane stood five feet seven in her stockings and had a forearm like the village blacksmith's, but she liked being called "little one".

"How strange that we should meet like this!" she said, blushing brightly.

"After all these years," said Rodney Spelvin, taking a chance.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

It would be a nuisance if it turned out that they had met at a studio-party the day before yesterday, but something seemed to tell him that she dated back a goodish way. Besides, even if they had met the day before yesterday, he could get out of it by saying that the hours had seemed like years. For you cannot stymie these modern poets. The boys are there.

"More than five," murmured Jane.

"Now where the deuce was I five years ago?" Rodney Spelvin asked himself.

Jane looked down at the pavement and shuffled her left shoe nervously.

"I got the violets, Rodney," she said.

Rodney Spelvin was considerably fogged, but he came back strongly.

"That's good!" he said. "You got the violets? That's capital. I was wondering if you would get the violets."

"It was like you to send them."

Rodney blinked, but recovered himself immediately. He waved his hand with a careless gesture, indicative of restrained nobility.

"Oh, as to that——!"

"Especially as I'm afraid I treated you rather badly. But it really was for the happiness of both of us that I broke off the engagement. You do understand that, don't you?"

A light broke upon Rodney Spelvin. He had been confident that it would if he only stalled along for a while. Now he placed this girl. She was Jane something, the girl he had been engaged to. By Jove, yes. He knew where he was now.

"Do not let us speak of it," he said, registering pain. It was quite easy for him to do this. All there was to it was tightening the lips and drawing up the left eyebrow. He had practised it in front of his mirror, for a fellow never knew when it might not come in useful.

"So you didn't forget me, Rodney?"

"Forget you!"

There was a short pause.

"I read your novel," said Jane. "I loved it."

She blushed again, and the colour in her cheeks made her look so remarkably pretty that Rodney began to feel some of the emotions which had stirred him five years ago. He decided that this was a good thing and wanted pushing along.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"I hoped that you might," he said in a low voice, massaging her hand. He broke off and directed into her eyes a look of such squashy sentimentality that Jane reeled where she stood. "I wrote it for you," he added, simply.

Jane gasped.

"For me?"

"I supposed you would have guessed," said Rodney. "Surely you saw the dedication?"

The Purple Fan had been dedicated, after Rodney Spelvin's eminently prudent fashion, to "One Who Will Understand". He had frequently been grateful for the happy inspiration.

"The dedication?"

"'To One Who Will Understand'," said Rodney, softly. "Who would that be but you?"

"Oh, Rodney!"

"And didn't you recognize Eulalie, Jane? Surely you cannot have failed to recognize Eulalie?"

"Recognize her?"

"I drew her from you," said Rodney Spelvin.

Jane's mind was in a whirl as she went home in the train. To have met Rodney Spelvin again was enough in itself to stimulate into activity that hidden pulse of romance in her. To discover that she had been in his thoughts so continuously all these years and that she still held such sway over his faithful heart that he had drawn the heroine of his novel from her was simply devastating. Mechanically she got out at the right station and mechanically made her way to the cottage. She was relieved to find that William was still out on the links. She loved William devotedly, of course, but just at the moment he would have been in the way; for she wanted a quiet hour with *The Purple Fan*. It was necessary for her to re-read in the light of this new knowledge the more important of the scenes in which Eulalie French figured. She knew them practically by heart already, but nevertheless she wished to read them again. When William returned, warm and jubilant, she was so absorbed that she only just had time to slide the book under the sofa cushion before the door opened.

Some guardian angel ought to have warned William Bates that he was selecting a bad moment for his re-entry into the home, or at least to have hinted that a preliminary wash and brush-up

THE HEART OF A GOOF

would be no bad thing. There had been rain in the night, causing the links to become a trifle soggy in spots, and William was one of those energetic golfers who do not spare themselves. The result was that his pleasant features were a good deal obscured by mud. An explosion-shot out of the bunker on the fourteenth had filled his hair with damp sand, and his shoes were a disgrace to any refined home. No, take him for all in all, William did not look his best. He was fine if the sort of man you admired was the brawny athlete straight from the dust of the arena; but on a woman who was picturing herself the heroine of *The Purple Fan* he was bound to jar. Most of the scenes in which Eulalie French played anything like a fat part took place either on moonlight terraces or in beautifully furnished studios beneath the light of Oriental lamps with pink silk shades, and all the men who came in contact with her—except her husband, a clodhopping brute who spent most of his time in riding-kit—were perfectly dressed and had dark, clean-cut, sensitive faces.

William, accordingly, induced in Jane something closely approximating to the heeby-jeebies.

"Hullo, old girl!" said William, affectionately. "You back? What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, shopping," said Jane, listlessly.

"See anyone you knew?"

For a moment Jane hesitated.

"Yes," she said. "I met Rodney Spelvin."

Jealousy and suspicion had been left entirely out of William Bates's make-up. He did not start and frown; he did not clutch the arm of his chair; he merely threw back his head and laughed like a hyæna. And that laugh wounded Jane more than the most violent exhibition of mistrust could have done.

"Good Lord!" gurgled William, jovially. "You don't mean to say that bird is still going around loose? I should have thought he would have been lynched years ago. Looks like negligence somewhere."

There comes a moment in married life when every wife gazes squarely at her husband and the scales seem to fall from her eyes and she sees him as he is—one of Nature's Class A fatheads. Fortunately for married men, these times of clear vision do not last long, or there would be few homes left unbroken. It was so that Jane gazed at William now, but unhappily her conviction

THE HEART OF A GOOF

that he was an out-size in rough-neck chumps did not pass. Indeed, all through that evening it deepened. That night she went to bed feeling for the first time that, when the clergyman had said, "Wilt thou, Jane?" and she had replied in the affirmative, a mean trick had been played on an inexperienced girl.

And so began that black period in the married life of Jane and William Bates, the mere recollection of which in after years was sufficient to put them right off their short game and even to affect their driving from the tee. To William, having no clue to the cause of the mysterious change in his wife, her behaviour was inexplicable. Had not her perfect robustness made such a theory absurd, he would have supposed that she was sickening for something. She golfed now intermittently, and often with positive reluctance. She was frequently listless and distrait. And there were other things about her of which he disapproved.

"I say, old girl," he said one evening, "I know you won't mind my mentioning it, and I don't suppose you're aware of it yourself, but recently you've developed a sort of silvery laugh. A nasty thing to have about the home. Try to switch it off, old bird, would you mind?"

Jane said nothing. The man was not worth answering. All through the pages of *The Purple Fan*, Eulalie French's silvery laugh had been highly spoken of and greatly appreciated by one and all. It was the thing about her that the dark, clean-cut, sensitive-faced men most admired. And the view Jane took of the matter was that if William did not like it the poor fish could do the other thing.

But this brutal attack decided her to come out into the open with the grievance which had been vexing her soul for weeks past.

"William," she said, "I want to say something. William, I am feeling stifled."

"I'll open the window."

"Stifled in this beastly little village, I mean," said Jane, impatiently. "Nobody ever does anything here except play golf and bridge, and you never meet an artist-soul from one year's end to the other. How can I express myself? How can I be myself? How can I fulfil myself?"

"Do you want to?" asked William, somewhat out of his depth.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Of course I want to. And I shan't be happy unless we leave this ghastly place and go to live in a studio in town."

William sucked thoughtfully at his pipe. It was a tense moment for a man who hated metropolitan life as much as he did. Nevertheless, if the solution of Jane's recent weirdness was simply that she had got tired of the country and wanted to live in town, to the town they must go. After a first involuntary recoil, he nerved himself to the martyrdom like the fine fellow he was.

"We'll pop off as soon as I can sell the house," he said.

"I can't wait as long as that. I want to go now."

"All right," said William, amiably. "We'll go next week."

William's forebodings were quickly fulfilled. Before he had been in the Metropolis ten days he realized that he was up against it as he had never been up against it before. He and Jane and little Braid Vardon had established themselves in what the house-agent described as an attractive bijou studio-apartment in the heart of the artistic quarter. There was a nice bedroom for Jane, a delightful cupboard for Braid Vardon, and a cosy corner behind a Japanese screen for William. Most compact. The rest of the place consisted of a room with a large skylight, handsomely furnished with cushions and samovars, where Jane gave parties to the intelligentsia.

It was these parties that afflicted William as much as anything else. He had not realized that Jane intended to run a *salon*. His idea of a pleasant social evening was to have a couple of old friends in for a rubber of bridge, and the almost nightly incursion of a horde of extraordinary birds in floppy ties stunned him. He was unequal to the situation from the first. While Jane sat enthroned on her cushion, exchanging gay badinage with rising young poets and laughing that silvery laugh of hers, William would have to stand squashed in a corner, trying to hold off some bobbed-haired female who wanted his opinion of Augustus John.

The strain was frightful, and, apart from the sheer discomfort of it, he found to his consternation that it was beginning to affect his golf. Whenever he struggled out from the artistic zone now to one of the suburban courses, his jangled nerves unfitted him for decent play. Bit by bit his game left him. First he found that he could not express himself with the putter. Then he

began to fail to be himself with the mashie-niblick. And when at length he discovered that he was only fulfilling himself about every fifth shot off the tee he felt that this thing must stop.

The conscientious historian will always distinguish carefully between the events leading up to a war and the actual occurrence resulting in the outbreak of hostilities. The latter may be, and generally is, some almost trivial matter, whose only importance is that it fulfils the function of the last straw. In the case of Jane and William what caused the definite rift was Jane's refusal to tie a can to Rodney Spelvin.

The author of *The Purple Fan* had been from the first a leading figure in Jane's *salon*. Most of those who attended these functions were friends of his, introduced by him, and he had assumed almost from the beginning the demeanour of a master of the revels. William, squashed into his corner, had long gazed at the man with sullen dislike, yearning to gather him up by the slack of his trousers and heave him into outer darkness; but it is improbable that he would have overcome his native amiability sufficiently to make any active move, had it not been for the black mood caused by his rotten golf. But one evening, when, coming home after doing the Mossy Heath course in five strokes over the hundred, he found the studio congested with Rodney Spelvin and his friends, many of them playing ukeleles, he decided that flesh and blood could bear the strain no longer.

As soon as the last guest had gone he delivered his ultimatum.

"Listen, Jane," he said. "Touching on this Spelvin bloke."

"Well?" said Jane, coldly. She scented battle from afar.

"He gives me a pain in the neck."

"Really?" said Jane, and laughed a silvery laugh.

"Don't do it, old girl," pleaded William, wincing.

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'old girl'."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like it."

"You used to like it."

"Well, I don't now."

"Oh!" said William, and ruminated a while. "Well, be that as it may," he went on, "I want to tell you just one thing. Either you throw the bloke Spelvin out on his left ear and send

for the police if he tries to get in again, or I push off. I mean it! I absolutely push off."

There was a tense silence.

"Indeed?" said Jane at last.

"Positively push off," repeated William, firmly. "I can stand a lot, but pie-faced Spelvin tries human endurance too high."

"He is not pie-faced," said Jane, warmly.

"He *is* pie-faced," insisted William. "Come round to the Vienna Bon-Ton Bakery tomorrow and I will show you an individual custard-pie that might be his brother."

"Well, I am certainly not going to be bullied into giving up an old friend just because——"

William stared.

"You mean you won't hand him the mitten?"

"I will not."

"Think what you are saying, Jane. You positively decline to give this false-alarm the quick exit?"

"I do."

"Then," said William, "all is over. I pop off."

Jane stalked without a word into her bedroom. With a mist before his eyes William began to pack. After a few momnets he tapped at her door.

"Jane."

"Well?"

"I'm packing."

"Indeed?"

"But I can't find my spare mashie."

"I don't care."

William returned to his packing. When it was finished, he stole to her door again. Already a faint stab of remorse was becoming blended with his just indignation.

"Jane."

"Well?"

"I've packed."

"Really?"

"And now I'm popping."

There was silence behind the door.

"I'm popping, Jane," said William. And in his voice, though he tried to make it cold and crisp, there was a note of wistfulness.

Through the door there came a sound. It was the sound of a silvery laugh. And as he heard it William's face hardened.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Without another word he picked up his suit-case and golf-bag, and with set jaw strode out into the night.

One of the things that tend to keep the home together in these days of modern unrest is the fact that exalted moods of indignation do not last. William, released from the uncongenial atmosphere of the studio, proceeded at once to plunge into an orgy of golf that for a while precluded regret. Each day he indulged his starved soul with fifty-four holes, and each night he sat smoking in bed, pleasantly fatigued, reviewing the events of the past twelve hours with complete satisfaction. It seemed to him that he had done the good and sensible thing.

And then, slowly at first, but day by day more rapidly, his mood began to change. That delightful feeling of jolly freedom ebbed away.

It was on the morning of the tenth day that he first became definitely aware that all was not well. He had strolled out on the links after breakfast with a brassie and a dozen balls for a bit of practice, and, putting every ounce of weight and muscle into the stroke, brought off a snifter with his very first shot. Straight and true the ball sped for the distant green, and William, forgetting everything in the ecstasy of the moment, uttered a gladsome cry.

"How about that one, old girl?" he exclaimed.

And then, with a sudden sinking of the heart, he realized that he was alone.

An acute spasm of regret shot through William's massive bosom. In that instant of clear thinking he understood that golf is not all. What shall it profit a man that he do the long hole in four, if there is no loving wife at his elbow to squeak congratulations? A dull sensation of forlorn emptiness afflicted William Bates. It passed, but it had been. And he knew it would come again.

It did. It came that same afternoon. It came next morning. Gradually it settled like a cloud on his happiness. He did his best to fight it down. He increased his day's output to sixty-three holes, but found no relief. When he reflected that he had had the stupendous luck to be married to a girl like Jane and had chucked the thing up, he could have kicked himself round the house. He was in exactly the position of the hero of the movie when the sub-title is flashed on the screen: "Came

THE HEART OF A GOOF

a Day When Remorse Bit Like An Adder Into Roland Spenlow's Soul." Of all the chumps who had ever tripped over themselves and lost a good thing, from Adam downwards, he, he told himself, was the woollen-headedest.

On the fifteenth morning it began to rain.

Now, William Bates was not one of your fair-weather golfers. It took more than a shower to discourage him. But this was real rain, with which not even the stoutest enthusiast could cope. It poured down all day in a solid sheet and set the seal on his melancholy. He pottered about the house, sinking deeper and deeper into the slough of despond, and was trying to derive a little faint distraction from practising putts into a tooth-glass when the afternoon post arrived.

There was only one letter. He opened it listlessly. It was from Jukes, Enderby, and Miller, florists, and what the firm wished to ascertain was whether, his deposit on white violets to be dispatched annually to Mrs. William Bates being now exhausted, he desired to renew his esteemed order. If so, on receipt of the money they would spring to the task of sending same.

William stared at the letter dully. His first impression was that Jukes, Enderby, and Miller were talking through their collective hats. White violets? What was all this drivel about white violets? Jukes was an ass. He knew nothing about white violets. Enderby was a fool. What had he got to do with white violets? Miller was a pin-head. He had never deposited any money to have white violets dispatched.

William gasped. Yes, by George, he had, though, he remembered with a sudden start. So he had, by golly! Good gosh! it all came back to him. He recalled the whole thing, by Jove! Crikey, yes!

The letter swam before William's eyes. A wave of tenderness engulfed him. All that had passed recently between Jane and himself was forgotten—her weirdness, her wish to live in the Metropolis, her silvery laugh—everything. With one long, loving gulp, William Bates dashed a not unmanly tear from his eye and, grabbing a hat and raincoat, rushed out of the house and sprinted for the station.

At about the hour when William flung himself into the train, Jane was sitting in her studio-apartment, pensively watching

little Braid Vardon as he sported on the floor. An odd melancholy had gripped her. At first she had supposed that this was due to the rain, but now she was beginning to realize that the thing went much deeper than that. Reluctant though she was to confess it, she had to admit that what she was suffering from was a genuine soul-sadness, due entirely to the fact that she wanted William.

It was strange what a difference his going had made. William was the sort of fellow you shoved into a corner and forgot about, but when he was not there the whole scheme of things seemed to go blooey. Little by little, since his departure, she had found the fascination of her surroundings tending to wane, and the glamour of her new friends had dwindled noticeably. Unless you were in the right vein for them, Jane felt, they could be an irritating crowd. They smoked too many cigarettes and talked too much. And not far from being the worst of them, she decided, was Rodney Spelvin. It was with a sudden feeling of despair that she remembered that she had invited him to tea this afternoon and had got in a special seed-cake for the occasion. The last thing in the world that she wanted to do was to watch Rodney Spelvin eating cake.

It is a curious thing about men of the Spelvin type, how seldom they really last. They get off to a flashy start and for a while convince impressionable girls that the search for a soul-mate may be considered formally over; but in a very short while reaction always sets in. There had been a time when Jane could have sat and listened to Rodney Spelvin for hours on end. Then she began to feel that from fifteen to twenty minutes was about sufficient. And now the mere thought of having to listen to him at all was crushing her like a heavy burden.

She had got thus far in her meditations when her attention was attracted to little Braid Vardon, who was playing energetically in a corner with some object which Jane could not distinguish in the dim light.

"What have you got there, dear?" she asked.

"Wah," said little Braid, a child of few words, proceeding with his activities.

Jane rose and walked across the room. A sudden feeling had come to her, the remorseful feeling that for some time now she had been neglecting the child. How seldom nowadays did she trouble to join in his pastimes!

"Let mother play too," she said, gently. "What are you playing? Trains?"

"Golf."

Jane uttered a sharp exclamation. With a keen pang she saw that what the child had got hold of was William's spare mashie. So he had left it behind after all! Since the night of his departure it must have been lying unnoticed behind some chair or sofa.

For a moment the only sensation Jane felt was an accentuation of that desolate feeling which had been with her all day. How many a time had she stood by William and watched him fizzle with this club! Inextricably associated with him it was, and her eyes filled with sudden tears. And then she was abruptly conscious of a new, a more violent emotion, something akin to panic fear. She blinked, hoping against hope that she had been mistaken. But no. When she opened her eyes and looked again she saw what she had seen before.

The child was holding the mashie all wrong.

"Braid!" gasped Jane in an agony.

All the mother-love in her was shrieking at her, reproaching her. She realized now how paltry, how greedily self-centred she had been. Thinking only of her own pleasures, how sorely she had neglected her duty as a mother! Long ere this, had she been worthy of that sacred relation, she would have been brooding over her child, teaching him at her knee the correct Vardon grip, shielding him from bad habits, seeing to it that he did not get his hands in front of the ball, putting him on the right path as regarded the slow back-swing. But, absorbed in herself, she had sacrificed him to her shallow ambitions. And now there he was, grasping the club as if it had been a spade and scooping with it like one of those twenty-four-handicap men whom the hot weather brings out on seaside links.

She shuddered to the very depths of her soul. Before her eyes there rose a vision of her son, grown to manhood, reproaching her. "If you had but taught me the facts of life when I was a child, mother," she seemed to hear him say, "I would not now be going round in a hundred and twenty, rising to a hundred and forty in anything like a high wind."

She snatched the club from his hands with a passionate cry. And at this precise moment in came Rodney Spelvin, all ready for tea.

"Ah, little one!" said Rodney Spelvin, gaily.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Something in her appearance must have startled him, for he stopped and looked at her with concern.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

Jane pulled herself together with an effort.

"No, quite well. Ha, ha!" she replied, hysterically.

She stared at him wildly, as she might have stared at a caterpillar in her salad. If it had not been for this man, she felt, she would have been with William in their snug little cottage, a happy wife. If it had not been for this man, her only child would have been laying the foundations of a correct swing under the eyes of a conscientious pro. If it had not been for this man—— She waved him distractedly to the door.

"Good-bye," she said. "Thank you so much for calling."

Rodney Spelvin gaped. This had been the quickest and most tealess tea-party he had ever assisted at.

"You want me to go?" he said, incredulously.

"Yes, go! go!"

Rodney Spelvin cast a wistful glance at the gate-leg table. He had had a light lunch, and the sight of the seed-cake affected him deeply. But there seemed nothing to be done. He moved reluctantly to the door.

"Well, good-bye," he said. "Thanks for a very pleasant afternoon."

"So glad to have seen you," said Jane, mechanically.

The door closed. Jane returned to her thoughts. But she was not alone for long. A few minutes later there entered the female cubist painter from downstairs, a manly young woman with whom she had become fairly intimate.

"Oh, Bates, old chap!" said the cubist painter.

Jane looked up.

"Yes, Osbaldistone?"

"Just came in to borrow a cigarette. Used up all mine."

"So have I, I'm afraid."

"Too bad. Oh, well," said Miss Osbaldistone, resignedly, "I suppose I'll have to go out and get wet. I wish I had had the sense to stop Rodney Spelvin and send him. I met him on the stairs."

"Yes, he was in here just now," said Jane.

Miss Osbaldistone laughed in her hearty manly way.

"Good boy, Rodney," she said, "but too smooth for my taste. A little too ready with the salve."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Yes?" said Jane, absently.

"Has he pulled that one on you yet about your being the original of the heroine of *The Purple Fan*?"

"Why, yes," said Jane, surprised. "He did tell me that he had drawn Eulalie from me."

Her visitor emitted another laugh that shook the samovars.

"He tells every girl he meets the same thing."

"What!"

"Oh yes. It's his first move. He actually had the nerve to try to spring it on me. Mind you, I'm not saying it's a bad stunt. Most girls like it. You're sure you've no cigarettes? No? Well, how about a shot of cocaine? Out of that too? Oh, well, I'll be going, then. Pip-pip, Bates."

"Toodle-oo, Osbaldistone," said Jane, dizzily. Her brain was reeling. She groped her way to the table, and in a sort of trance cut herself a slice of cake.

"Wah!" said little Braid Vardon. He toddled forward, anxious to count himself in on the share-out.

Jane gave him some cake. Having ruined his life, it was, she felt, the least she could do. In a spasm of belated maternal love she also slipped him a jam-sandwich. But how trivial and useless these things seemed now.

"Braid!" she cried, suddenly.

"What?"

"Come here."

"Why?"

"Let mother show you how to hold that mashie."

"What's a mashie?"

A new gash opened in Jane's heart. Four years old, and he didn't know what a mashie was. And at only a slightly advanced age Bobby Jones had been playing in the American Open Championship.

"This is a mashie," she said, controlling her voice with difficulty.

"Why?"

"It is called a mashie."

"What is?"

"This club."

"Why?"

The conversation was becoming too metaphysical for Jane. She took the club from him and closed her hand over it.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Now, look, dear," she said, tenderly. "Watch how mother does it. She puts the fingers——"

A voice spoke, a voice that had been absent all too long from Jane's life.

"You'll pardon me, old girl, but you've got the right hand much too far over. You'll hook for a certainty."

In the doorway, large and dripping, stood William. Jane stared at him dumbly.

"William!" she gasped at length.

"Hullo, Jane!" said William. "Hullo, Braid! Thought I'd look in."

There was a long silence.

"Beastly weather," said William.

"Yes," said Jane.

"Wet and all that," said William.

"Yes," said Jane.

There was another silence.

"Oh, by the way, Jane," said William. "Knew there was something I wanted to say. You know those violets?"

"Violets?"

"White violets. You remember those white violets I've been sending you every year on our wedding anniversary? Well, what I mean to say, our lives are parted and all that sort of thing, but you won't mind if I go on sending them—what? Won't hurt you, what I'm driving at, and'll please me, see what I mean? So, well, to put the thing in a nutshell, if you haven't any objection, that's that."

Jane reeled against the gate-leg table.

"William! Was it you who sent those violets?"

"Absolutely. Who did you think it was?"

"William!" cried Jane, and flung herself into his arms.

William scooped her up gratefully. This was the sort of thing he had been wanting for weeks past. He could do with a lot of this. He wouldn't have suggested it himself, but, seeing that she felt that way, he was all for it.

"William," said Jane, "can you ever forgive me?"

"Oh, rather," said William. "Like a shot. Though, I mean to say, nothing to forgive, and all that sort of thing."

"We'll go back right away to our dear little cottage."

"Fine!"

"We'll never leave it again."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"Topping!"

"I love you," said Jane, "more than life itself."

"Good egg!" said William.

Jane turned with shining eyes to little Braid Vardon.

"Braid, we're going home with daddy!"

"Where?"

"Home. To our little cottage."

"What's a cottage?"

"The house where we used to be before we came here."

"What's here?"

"This is."

"Which?"

"Where we are now."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you what, old girl," said William. "Just shove a green-baize cloth over that kid, and then start in and brew me about five pints of tea as strong and hot as you can jolly well make it. Otherwise I'm going to get the cold of a lifetime."

CHAPTER IX

THE PURIFICATION OF RODNEY SPELVIN

IT was an afternoon on which one would have said that all Nature smiled. The air was soft and balmy; the links, fresh from the rains of spring, glistened in the pleasant sunshine; and down on the second tee young Clifford Wimple, in a new suit of plus fours, had just sunk two balls in the lake, and was about to sink a third. No element, in short, was lacking that might be supposed to make for quiet happiness.

And yet on the forehead of the Oldest Member, as he sat beneath the chestnut tree on the terrace overlooking the ninth green, there was a peevish frown; and his eye, gazing down at the rolling expanse of turf, lacked its customary genial benevolence. His favourite chair, consecrated to his private and personal use by unwritten law, had been occupied by another. That is the worst of a free country—liberty so often degenerates into licence.

The Oldest Member coughed.

"I trust," he said, "you find that chair comfortable?"

The intruder, who was the club's hitherto spotless secretary, glanced up in a goofy manner.

"Eh?"

"That chair—you find it fits snugly to the figure?"

"Chair? Figure? Oh, you mean this chair? Oh yes."

"I am gratified and relieved," said the Oldest Member.

There was a silence.

"Look here," said the secretary, "what would you do in a case like this? You know I'm engaged?"

"I do. And no doubt your *fiancée* is missing you. Why not go in search of her?"

"She's the sweetest girl on earth."

"I should lose no time."

"But jealous. And just now I was in my office, and that Mrs. Pettigrew came in to ask if there was any news of the purse which

THE HEART OF A GOOF

she lost a couple of days ago. It had just been brought to my office, so I produced it; whereupon the infernal woman, in a most unsuitably girlish manner, flung her arms round my neck and kissed me on my bald spot. And at that moment Adela came in. Death," said the secretary, "where is thy sting?"

The Oldest Member's pique melted. He had a feeling heart.

"Most unfortunate. What did you say?"

"I hadn't time to say anything. She shot out too quick."

The Oldest Member clicked his tongue sympathetically.

"These misunderstandings between young and ardent hearts are very frequent," he said. "I could tell you at least fifty cases of the same kind. The one which I will select is the story of Jane Packard, William Bates, and Rodney Spelvin."

"You told me that the other day. Jane Packard got engaged to Rodney Spelvin, the poet, but the madness passed and she married William Bates, who was a golfer."

"This is another story of the trio."

"You told me that one, too. After Jane Packard married William Bates she fell once more under the spell of Spelvin, but repented in time."

"This is still another story. Making three in all."

The secretary buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, well," he said, "go ahead. What does anything matter now?"

"First," said the Oldest Member, "let us make ourselves comfortable. Take this chair. It is easier than the one in which you are sitting."

"No, thanks."

"I insist."

"Oh, all right."

"Woof!" said the Oldest Member, settling himself luxuriously.

With an eye now full of kindly good-will, he watched young Clifford Wimple play his fourth. Then, as the silver drops flashed up into the sun, he nodded approvingly and began.

The story which I am about to relate (said the Oldest Member) begins at a time when Jane and William had been married some seven years. Jane's handicap was eleven, William's twelve, and their little son, Braid Vardon, had just celebrated his sixth birthday.

Ever since that dreadful time, two years before, when, lured

by the glamour of Rodney Spelvin, she had taken a studio in the artistic quarter, dropped her golf, and practically learned to play the ukelele, Jane had been unremitting in her efforts to be a good mother and to bring up her son on the strictest principles. And, in order that his growing mind might have every chance, she had invited William's younger sister, Anastatia, to spend a week or two with them and put the child right on the true functions of the mashie. For Anastatia had reached the semi-finals of the last Ladies' Open Championship and, unlike many excellent players, had the knack of teaching.

On the evening on which this story opens the two women were sitting in the drawing-room, chatting. They had finished tea; and Anastatia, with the aid of a lump of sugar, a spoon, and some crumpled cake, was illustrating the method by which she had got out of the rough on the fifth at Squashy Hollow.

"You're wonderful!" said Jane, admiringly. "And such a good influence for Braid! You'll give him his lesson tomorrow afternoon as usual?"

"I shall have to make it the morning," said Anastatia. "I've promised to meet a man in town in the afternoon."

As she spoke there came into her face a look so soft and dreamy that it roused Jane as if a bradawl had been driven into her leg. As her history has already shown, there was a strong streak of romance in Jane Bates.

"Who is he?" she asked, excitedly.

"A man I met last summer," said Anastatia.

And she sighed with such abandon that Jane could no longer hold in check her womanly nosiness.

"Do you love him?" she cried.

"Like bricks," whispered Anastatia.

"Does he love you?"

"Sometimes I think so."

"What's his name?"

"Rodney Spelvin."

"What!"

"Oh, I know he writes the most awful bilge," said Anastatia, defensively, misinterpreting the yowl of horror which had proceeded from Jane. "All the same, he's a darling."

Jane could not speak. She stared at her sister-in-law aghast. Although she knew that if you put a driver in her hands she could paste the ball into the next county, there always seemed to her

something fragile and helpless about Anastatia. William's sister was one of those small, rose-leaf girls with big blue eyes to whom good men instinctively want to give a stroke a hole and on whom bad men automatically prey. And when Jane reflected that Rodney Spelvin had to all intents and purposes preyed upon herself, who stood five foot seven in her shoes and, but for an innate love of animals, could have felled an ox with a blow, she shuddered at the thought of how he would prey on this innocent half-portion.

"You really love him?" she quavered.

"If he beckoned to me in the middle of a medal round, I would come to him," said Anastatia.

Jane realized that further words were useless. A sickening sense of helplessness obsessed her. Something ought to be done about this terrible thing, but what could she do? She was so ashamed of her past madness that not even to warn this girl could she reveal that she had once been engaged to Rodney Spelvin herself; that he had recited poetry on the green while she was putting; and that, later, he had hypnotized her into taking William and little Braid to live in a studio full of samovars. These revelations would no doubt open Anastatia's eyes, but she could not make them.

And then, suddenly, Fate pointed out a way.

It was Jane's practice to go twice a week to the cinema palace in the village; and two nights later she set forth as usual and took her place just as the entertainment was about to begin.

At first she was only mildly interested. The title of the picture, "Tried in the Furnace", had suggested nothing to her. Being a regular patron of the silver screen, she knew that it might quite easily turn out to be an educational film on the subject of clinker-coal. But as the action began to develop she found herself leaning forward in her seat, blindly crushing a caramel between her fingers. For scarcely had the operator started to turn the crank when inspiration came to her.

Of the main plot of "Tried in the Furnace" she retained, when finally she reeled out into the open air, only a confused recollection. It had something to do with money not bringing happiness or happiness not bringing money, she could not remember which. But the part which remained graven upon her mind was the bit where Gloria Gooch goes by night to the

THE HEART OF A GOOF

apartments of the libertine, to beg him to spare her sister, whom he has entangled in his toils.

Jane saw her duty clearly. She must go to Rodney Spelvin and conjure him by the memory of their ancient love to spare Anastatia.

It was not the easiest of tasks to put this scheme into operation. Gloria Gooch, being married to a scholarly man who spent nearly all his time in a library a hundred yards long, had been fortunately situated in the matter of paying visits to libertines; but for Jane the job was more difficult. William expected her to play a couple of rounds with him in the morning and another in the afternoon, which rather cut into her time. However, Fate was still on her side, for one morning at breakfast William announced that business called him to town.

"Why don't you come too?" he said.

Jane started.

"No. No, I don't think I will, thanks."

"Give you lunch somewhere."

"No. I want to stay here and do some practice-putting."

"All right. I'll try to get back in time for a round in the evening."

Remorse gnawed at Jane's vitals. She had never deceived William before. She kissed him with even more than her usual fondness when he left to catch the ten-forty-five. She waved to him till he was out of sight; then, bounding back into the house, leaped at the telephone and, after a series of conversations with the Marks-Morris Glue Factory, the Poor Pussy Home for Indigent Cats, and Messrs. Oakes, Oakes, and Parbury, dealers in fancy goods, at last found herself in communication with Rodney Spelvin.

"Rodney?" she said, and held her breath, fearful at this breaking of a two years' silence and yet loath to hear another strange voice say "Wadnumjerwant?" "Is that you, Rodney?"

"Yes. Who is that?"

"Mrs. Bates. Rodney, can you give me lunch at the Alcazar today at one?"

"Can I!" Not even the fact that some unknown basso had got on the wire and was asking if that was Mr. Bootle could blur the enthusiasm in his voice. "I should say so!"

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"One o'clock, then," said Jane. His enthusiastic response had relieved her. If by merely speaking she could stir him so, to bend him to her will when they met face to face would be pie.

"One o'clock," said Rodney.

Jane hung up the receiver and went to her room to try on hats.

The impression came to Jane, when she entered the lobby of the restaurant and saw him waiting, that Rodney Spelvin looked somehow different from the Rodney she remembered. His handsome face had a deeper and more thoughtful expression, as if he had been through some ennobling experience.

"Well, here I am," she said, going to him and affecting a jauntiness which she did not feel.

He looked at her, and there was in his eyes that unmistakable goggle which comes to men suddenly addressed in a public spot by women whom, to the best of their recollection, they do not know from Eve.

"How are you?" he said. He seemed to pull himself together. "You're looking splendid."

"You're looking fine," said Jane.

"You're looking awfully well," said Rodney.

"You're looking awfully well," said Jane.

"You're looking fine," said Rodney.

There was a pause.

"You'll excuse me glancing at my watch," said Rodney. "I have an appointment to lunch with—er—somebody here, and it's past the time."

"But you're lunching with me," said Jane, puzzled.

"With you?"

"Yes. I rang you up this morning."

Rodney gaped.

"Was it you who phoned? I thought you said 'Miss Bates'."

"No, Mrs. Bates."

"Mrs. Bates?"

"Mrs. Bates."

"Of course. You're Mrs. Bates."

"Had you forgotten me?" said Jane, in spite of herself a little piqued.

"Forgotten you, dear lady! As if I could!" said Rodney,

with a return of his old manner. "Well, shall we go in and have lunch?"

"All right," said Jane.

She felt embarrassed and ill at ease. The fact that Rodney had obviously succeeded in remembering her only after the effort of a lifetime seemed to her to fling a spanner into the machinery of her plans at the very outset. It was going to be difficult, she realized, to conjure him by the memory of their ancient love to spare Anastatia; for the whole essence of the idea of conjuring anyone by the memory of their ancient love is that the party of the second part should be aware that there ever was such a thing.

At the luncheon-table conversation proceeded fitfully. Rodney said that this morning he could have sworn it was going to rain, and Jane said she had thought so, too, and Rodney said that now it looked as if the weather might hold up, and Jane said Yes, didn't it? and Rodney said he hoped the weather would hold up because rain was such a nuisance, and Jane said Yes, wasn't it? Rodney said yesterday had been a nice day, and Jane said Yes, and Rodney said that it seemed to be getting a little warmer, and Jane said Yes, and Rodney said that summer would be here any moment now, and Jane said Yes, wouldn't it? and Rodney said he hoped it would not be too hot this summer, but that, as a matter of fact, when you came right down to it, what one minded was not so much the heat as the humidity, and Jane said Yes, didn't one?

In short, by the time they rose and left the restaurant, not a word had been spoken that could have provoked the censure of the sternest critic. Yet William Bates, catching sight of them as they passed down the aisle, started as if he had been struck by lightning. He had happened to find himself near the Alcazar at lunch-time and had dropped in for a chop; and, peering round the pillar which had hidden his table from theirs, he stared after them with saucer-like eyes.

"Oh, dash it!" said William.

This William Bates, as I have indicated in my previous references to him, was not an abnormally emotional or temperamental man. Built physically on the lines of a motor-lorry, he had much of that vehicle's placid and even phlegmatic outlook on life. Few things had the power to ruffle William, but, unfortunately, it so happened that one of these things was Rodney Spelvin.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

He had never been able entirely to overcome his jealousy of this man. It had been Rodney who had come within an ace of scooping Jane from him in the days when she had been Miss Packard. It had been Rodney who had temporarily broken up his home some years later by persuading Jane to become a member of the artistic set. And now, unless his eyes jolly well deceived him, this human gumboil was once more busy on his dastardly work. Too dashed thick, was William's view of the matter; and he gnashed his teeth in such a spasm of resentful fury that a man lunching at the next table told the waiter to switch off the electric fan, as it had begun to creak unendurably.

Jane was reading in the drawing-room when William reached home that night.

"Had a nice day?" asked William.

"Quite nice," said Jane.

"Play golf?" asked William.

"Just practised," said Jane.

"Lunch at the club?"

"Yes."

"I thought I saw that bloke Spelvin in town," said William.

Jane wrinkled her forehead.

"Spelvin? Oh, you mean Rodney Spelvin? Did you? I see he's got a new book coming out."

"You never run into him these days, do you?"

"Oh no. It must be two years since I saw him."

"Oh?" said William. "Well, I'll be going upstairs and dressing."

It seemed to Jane, as the door closed, that she heard a curious clicking noise, and she wondered for a moment if little Braid had got out of bed and was playing with the Mah-Jongg counters. But it was only William gnashing his teeth.

There is nothing sadder in this life than the spectacle of a husband and wife with practically identical handicaps drifting apart; and to dwell unnecessarily on such a spectacle is, to my mind, ghoulish. It is not my purpose, therefore, to weary you with a detailed description of the hourly widening of the breach between this once ideally united pair. Suffice it to say that within a few days of the conversation just related the entire

atmosphere of this happy home had completely altered. On the Tuesday, William excused himself from the morning round on the plea that he had promised Peter Willard a match, and Jane said What a pity! On Tuesday afternoon William said that his head ached, and Jane said Isn't that too bad? On Wednesday morning William said he had lumbago, and Jane, her sensitive feelings now deeply wounded, said Oh, had he? After that, it came to be agreed between them by silent compact that they should play together no more.

Also, they began to avoid one another in the house. Jane would sit in the drawing-room, while William retired down the passage to his den. In short, if you had added a couple of ikons and a photograph of Trotsky, you would have had a *mise en scène* which would have fitted a Russian novel like the paper on the wall.

One evening, about a week after the beginning of this tragic state of affairs, Jane was sitting in the drawing-room, trying to read *Braid on Taking Turf*. But the print seemed blurred and the philosophy too metaphysical to be grasped. She laid the book down and stared sadly before her.

Every moment of these black days had affected Jane like a stymie on the last green. She could not understand how it was that William should have come to suspect, but that he did suspect was plain; and she writhed on the horns of a dilemma. All she had to do to win him back again was to go to him and tell him of Anastatia's fatal entanglement. But what would happen then? Undoubtedly he would feel it his duty as a brother to warn the girl against Rodney Spelvin; and Jane instinctively knew that William warning anyone against Rodney Spelvin would sound like a private of the line giving his candid opinion of the sergeant-major.

Inevitably, in this case, Anastatia, a spirited girl and deeply in love, would take offence at his words and leave the house. And if she left the house, what would be the effect on little Braid's mashie-play? Already, in less than a fortnight, the gifted girl had taught him more about the chip-shot from ten to fifteen yards off the green than the local pro. had been able to do in two years. Her departure would be absolutely disastrous.

What it amounted to was that she must sacrifice her husband's happiness or her child's future; and the problem of which was to get the loser's end was becoming daily more insoluble.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

She was still brooding on it when the postman arrived with the evening mail, and the maid brought the letters into the drawing-room.

Jane sorted them out. There were three for William, which she gave to the maid to take to him in his den. There were two for herself, both bills. And there was one for Anastatia, in the well-remembered handwriting of Rodney Spelvin.

Jane placed this letter on the mantelpiece, and stood looking at it like a cat at a canary. Anastatia was away for the day, visiting friends who lived a few stations down the line; and every womanly instinct in Jane urged her to get hold of a kettle and steam the gum off the envelope. She had almost made up her mind to disembowel the thing and write "Opened in error" on it, when the telephone suddenly went off like a bomb and nearly startled her into a decline. Coming at that moment it sounded like the Voice of Conscience.

"Hullo?" said Jane.

"Hullo!" replied a voice.

Jane clucked like a hen with uncontrollable emotion. It was Rodney.

"Is that you?" asked Rodney.

"Yes," said Jane.

And so it was, she told herself.

"Your voice is like music," said Rodney.

This may or may not have been the case, but at any rate it was exactly like every other female voice when heard on the telephone. Rodney prattled on without a suspicion.

"Have you got my letter yet?"

"No," said Jane. She hesitated. "What was in it?" she asked, tremulously.

"It was to ask you to come to my house tomorrow at four."

"To your house!" faltered Jane.

"Yes. Everything is ready. I will send the servants out, so that we shall be quite alone. You will come, won't you?"

The room was shimmering before Jane's eyes, but she regained command of herself with a strong effort.

"Yes," she said. "I will be there."

She spoke softly, but there was a note of menace in her voice. Yes, she would indeed be there. From the very moment when this man had made his monstrous proposal, she had been asking

herself what Gloria Gooch would have done in a crisis like this. And the answer was plain. Gloria Gooch, if her sister-in-law was intending to visit the apartments of a libertine, would have gone there herself to save the poor child from the consequences of her infatuated folly.

"Yes," said Jane, "I will be there."

"You have made me the happiest man in the world," said Rodney. "I will meet you at the corner of the street at four, then." He paused. "What is that curious clicking noise?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Jane. "I noticed it myself. Something wrong with the wire, I suppose."

"I thought it was somebody playing the castanets. Until tomorrow, then, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Jane replaced the receiver. And William, who had been listening to every word of the conversation on the extension in his den, replaced his receiver, too.

Anastatia came back from her visit late that night. She took her letter, and read it without comment. At breakfast next morning she said that she would be compelled to go into town that day.

"I want to see my dressmaker," she said.

"I'll come, too," said Jane. "I want to see my dentist."

"So will I," said William. "I want to see my lawyer."

"That will be nice," said Anastatia, after a pause.

"Very nice," said Jane, after another pause.

"We might all lunch together," said Anastatia. "My appointment is not till four."

"I should love it," said Jane. "My appointment is at four, too."

"So is mine," said William.

"What a coincidence!" said Jane, trying to speak brightly.

"Yes," said William. He may have been trying to speak brightly, too; but, if so, he failed. Jane was too young to have seen Salvini in *Othello*, but, had she witnessed that great tragedian's performance, she could not have failed to be struck by the resemblance between his manner in the pillow scene and William's now.

"Then shall we all lunch together?" said Anastatia.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"I shall lunch at my club," said William, curtly.

"William seems to have a grouch," said Anastatia.

"Ha!" said William.

He raised his fork and drove it with sickening violence at his sausage.

So Jane had a quiet little woman's lunch at a confectioner's alone with Anastatia. Jane ordered a tongue-and-lettuce sandwich, two macaroons, marsh-mallows, ginger-ale and cocoa; and Anastatia ordered pineapple chunks with whipped cream, tomatoes stuffed with beetroot, three dill pickles, a raspberry nut sundae, and hot chocolate. And, while getting outside this garbage, they talked merrily, as women will, of every subject but the one that really occupied their minds. When Anastatia got up and said good-bye with a final reference to her dressmaker, Jane shuddered at the depths of deceit to which the modern girl can sink.

It was now about a quarter to three, so Jane had an hour to kill before going to the rendezvous. She wandered about the streets, and never had time appeared to her to pass so slowly, never had a city been so congested with hard-eyed and suspicious citizens. Every second person she met seemed to glare at her as if he or she had guessed her secret.

The very elements joined in the general disapproval. The sky had turned a sullen grey, and far-away thunder muttered faintly, like an impatient golfer held up on the tee by a slow four-some. It was a relief when at length she found herself at the back of Rodney Spelvin's house, standing before the scullery window, which it was her intention to force with the pocket-knife won in happier days as second prize in a competition at a summer hotel for those with handicaps above eighteen.

But the relief did not last long. Despite the fact that she was about to enter this evil house with the best motives, a sense of almost intolerable guilt oppressed her. If William should ever get to know of this! Wow! felt Jane.

How long she would have hesitated before the window, one cannot say. But at this moment, glancing guiltily round, she happened to catch the eye of a cat which was sitting on a near-by wall, and she read in this cat's eye such cynical derision that the urge came upon her to get out of its range as quickly as possible. It was a cat that had manifestly seen a lot of life, and it was

plainly putting an entirely wrong construction on her behaviour. Jane shivered, and, with a quick jerk prised the window open and climbed in.

It was two years since she had entered this house, but once she had reached the hall she remembered its topography perfectly. She mounted the stairs to the large studio sitting-room on the first floor, the scene of so many Bohemian parties in that dark period of her artistic life. It was here, she knew, that Rodney would bring his victim.

The studio was one of those dim, over-ornamented rooms which appeal to men like Rodney Spelvin. Heavy curtains hung in front of the windows. One corner was cut off by a high-backed Chesterfield. At the far end was an alcove, curtained like the windows. Once Jane had admired this studio, but now it made her shiver. It seemed to her one of those nests in which, as the sub-title of *Tried in the Furnace* had said, only eggs of evil are hatched. She paced the thick carpet restlessly, and suddenly there came to her the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

Jane stopped, every muscle tense. The moment had arrived. She faced the door, tight-lipped. It comforted her a little in this crisis to reflect that Rodney was not one of those massive Ethel M. Dell libertines who might make things unpleasant for an intruder. He was only a welter-weight egg of evil; and, if he tried to start anything, a girl of her physique would have little or no difficulty in knocking the stuffing out of him.

The footsteps reached the door. The handle turned. The door opened. And in strode William Bates, followed by two men in bowler hats.

"Ha!" said William.

Jane's lips parted, but no sound came from them. She staggered back a pace or two. William, advancing into the centre of the room, folded his arms and gazed at her with burning eyes.

"So," said William, and the words seemed forced like drops of vitriol from between his clenched teeth, "I find you here, dash it!"

Jane choked convulsively. Years ago, when an innocent child, she had seen a conjurer produce a rabbit out of a top-hat which an instant before had been conclusively proved to be empty. The sudden apparition of William affected her with much the same sensations as she had experienced then.

"How-ow-ow——?" she said.

"I beg your pardon?" said William, coldly.

"How-ow-ow——?"

"Explain yourself," said William.

"How-ow-ow did you get here? And who-oo-oo are these men?"

William seemed to become aware for the first time of the presence of his two companions. He moved a hand in a hasty gesture of introduction.

"Mr. Reginald Brown and Mr. Cyril Delancey—my wife," he said, curtly.

The two men bowed slightly and raised their bowler hats.

"Pleased to meet you," said one.

"Most awfully charmed," said the other.

"They are detectives," said William.

"Detectives!"

"From the Quick Results Agency," said William. "When I became aware of your clandestine intrigue, I went to the agency and they gave me their two best men."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Brown, blushing a little.

"Most frightfully decent of you to put it that way," said Mr. Delancey.

William regarded Jane sternly.

"I knew you were going to be here at four o'clock," he said.

"I overheard you making the assignation on the telephone."

"Oh, William!"

"Woman," said William, "where is your paramour?"

"Really, really," said Mr. Delancey, deprecatingly.

"Keep it clean," urged Mr. Brown.

"Your partner in sin, where is he? I am going to take him and tear him into little bits and stuff him down his throat and make him swallow himself."

"Fair enough," said Mr. Brown.

"Perfectly in order," said Mr. Delancey.

Jane uttered a stricken cry.

"William," she screamed, "I can explain all."

"All?" said Mr. Delancey.

"All?" said Mr. Brown.

"All," said Jane.

"All?" said William.

"All," said Jane.

William sneered bitterly.

"I'll bet you can't," he said.

"I'll bet I can," said Jane.

"Well?"

"I came here to save Anastatia."

"Anastatia?"

"Anastatia."

"My sister?"

"Your sister."

"His sister Anastatia," explained Mr. Brown to Mr. Delancey in an undertone.

"What from?" asked William.

"From Rodney Spelvin. Oh, William, can't you understand?"

"No, I'm dashed if I can."

"I, too," said Mr. Delancey, "must confess myself a little fogged. And you, Reggie?"

"Completely, Cyril," said Mr. Brown, removing his bowler hat with a puzzled frown, examining the maker's name, and putting it on again.

"The poor child is infatuated with this man."

"With the bloke Spelvin?"

"Yes. She is coming here with him at four o'clock."

"Important," said Mr. Brown, producing a notebook and making an entry.

"Important, if true," agreed Mr. Delancey.

"But I heard you making the appointment with the bloke Spelvin over the phone," said William.

"He thought I was Anastatia. And I came here to save her."

William was silent and thoughtful for a few moments.

"It all sounds very nice and plausible," he said, "but there's just one thing wrong. I'm not a very clever sort of bird, but I can see where your story slips up. If what you say is true, where is Anastatia?"

"Just coming in now," whispered Jane. "Hist!"

"Hist, Reggie!" whispered Mr. Delancey.

They listened. Yes, the front door had banged, and feet were ascending the staircase.

"Hide!" said Jane, urgently.

"Why?" said William.

THE HEART OF A GOOF

"So that you can overhear what they say and jump out and confront them."

"Sound," said Mr. Delancey.

"Very sound," said Mr. Brown.

The two detectives concealed themselves in the alcove. William retired behind the curtains in front of the window. Jane dived behind the Chesterfield. A moment later the door opened.

Crouching in her corner, Jane could see nothing, but every word that was spoken came to her ears; and with every syllable her horror deepened.

"Give me your things," she heard Rodney say, "and then we will go upstairs."

Jane shivered. The curtains by the window shook. From the direction of the alcove there came a soft scratching sound, as the two detectives made an entry in their notebooks.

For a moment after this there was silence. Then Anastatia uttered a sharp, protesting cry.

"Ah, no, no! Please, please!"

"But why not?" came Rodney's voice.

"It is wrong—wrong."

"I can't see why."

"It is, it is! You must not do that. Oh, please, please don't hold so tight."

There was a swishing sound, and through the curtains before the window a large form burst. Jane raised her head above the Chesterfield.

William was standing there, a menacing figure. The two detectives had left the alcove and were moistening their pencils. And in the middle of the room stood Rodney Spelvin, stooping slightly and grasping Anastatia's parasol in his hands.

"I don't get it," he said. "Why is it wrong to hold the dam' thing tight?" He looked up and perceived his visitors. "Ah, Bates," he said, absently. He turned to Anastatia again. "I should have thought that the tighter you held it, the more force you would get into the shot."

"But don't you see, you poor zimp," replied Anastatia, "that you've got to keep the ball straight. If you grip the shaft as if you were a drowning man clutching at a straw and keep your fingers under like that, you'll pull like the dickens and probably land out of bounds or in the rough. What's the good of getting

force into the shot if the ball goes in the wrong direction, you cloth-headed goof?"

"I see now," said Rodney, humbly. "How right you always are!"

"Look here," interrupted William, folding his arms. "What is the meaning of this?"

"You want to grip firmly but lightly," said Anastatia.

"Firmly but lightly," echoed Rodney.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"And with the fingers. Not with the palms."

"What is the meaning of this?" thundered William. "Anastatia, what are you doing in this man's rooms?"

"Giving him a golf lesson, of course. And I wish you wouldn't interrupt."

"Yes, yes," said Rodney, a little testily. "Don't interrupt, Bates, there's a good fellow. Surely you have things to occupy you elsewhere?"

"We'll go upstairs," said Anastatia, "where we can be alone."

"You will not go upstairs," barked William.

"We shall get on much better there," explained Anastatia. "Rodney has fitted up the top-floor back as an indoor practising room."

Jane darted forward with a maternal cry.

"My poor child, has the scoundrel dared to delude you by pretending to be a golfer? Darling, he is nothing of the kind."

Mr. Reginald Brown coughed. For some moments he had been twitching restlessly.

"Talking of golf," he said, "it might interest you to hear of a little experience I had the other day at Marshy Moor. I had got a nice drive off the tee, nothing record-breaking, you understand, but straight and sweet. And what was my astonishment on walking up to play my second to find——"

"A rather similar thing happened to me at Windy Waste last Tuesday," interrupted Mr. Delancey. "I had hooked my drive the merest trifle, and my caddie said to me, 'You're out of bounds.' 'I am not out of bounds,' I replied, perhaps a little tersely, for the lad had annoyed me by a persistent habit of sniffing. 'Yes, you are out of bounds,' he said. 'No, I am not out of bounds,' I retorted. Well, believe me or believe me not, when I got up to my ball——"

"Shut up!" said William.

"Just as you say, sir," replied Mr. Delancey, courteously.

Rodney Spelvin drew himself up, and in spite of her loathing for his villainy Jane could not help feeling what a noble and romantic figure he made. His face was pale, but his voice did not falter.

"You are right," he said. "I am not a golfer. But with the help of this splendid girl here, I hope humbly to be one some day. Ah, I know what you are going to say," he went on, raising a hand. "You are about to ask how a man who has wasted his life as I have done can dare to entertain the mad dream of ever acquiring a decent handicap. But never forget," proceeded Rodney, in a low, quivering voice, "that Walter J. Travis was nearly forty before he touched a club, and a few years later he won the British Amateur."

"True," murmured William.

"True, true," said Mr. Delancey and Mr. Brown. They lifted their bowler hats reverently.

"I am thirty-three years old," continued Rodney, "and for fourteen of these thirty-three years I have been writing poetry—aye, and novels with a poignant sex-appeal, and if ever I gave a thought to this divine game it was but to sneer at it. But last summer I saw the light."

"Glory! Glory!" cried Mr. Brown.

"One afternoon I was persuaded to try a drive. I took the club with a mocking, contemptuous laugh." He paused, and a wild light came into his eyes. "I brought off a perfect pip," he said, emotionally. "Two hundred yards and as straight as a whistle. And, as I stood there gazing after the ball, something seemed to run up my spine and bite me in the neck. It was the golf-germ."

"Always the way," said Mr. Brown. "I remember the first drive I ever made. I took a nice easy stance——"

"The first drive I made," said Mr. Delancey, "you won't believe this, but it's a fact, was a full——"

"From that moment," continued Rodney Spelvin, "I have had but one ambition—to somehow or other, cost what it might, get down into single figures." He laughed bitterly. "You see," he said, "I cannot even speak of this thing without splitting my infinitives. And even as I split my infinitives, so did I split my

drivers. After that first heavenly slosh I didn't seem able to do anything right."

He broke off, his face working. William cleared his throat awkwardly.

"Yes, but dash it," he said, "all this doesn't explain why I find you alone with my sister in what I might call your lair."

"The explanation is simple," said Rodney Spelvin. "This sweet girl is the only person in the world who seems able to simply and intelligently and in a few easily understood words make clear the knack of the thing. There is none like her, none. I have been to pro. after pro. but not one has been any good to me. I am a temperamental man, and there is a lack of sympathy and human understanding about these professionals which jars on my artist soul. They look at you as if you were a half-witted child. They click their tongues. They make odd Scotch noises. I could not endure the strain. And then this wonderful girl, to whom in a burst of emotion I had confided my unhappy case, offered to give me private lessons. So I went with her to some of those indoor practising places. But here, too, my sensibilities were racked by the fact that unsympathetic eyes observed me. So I fixed up a room here where we could be alone."

"And instead of going there," said Anastatia, "we are wasting half the afternoon talking."

William brooded for a while. He was not a quick thinker.

"Well, look here," he said at length, "this is the point. This is the nub of the thing. This is where I want you to follow me very closely. Have you asked Anastatia to marry you?"

"Marry me?" Rodney gazed at him, shocked. "Have I asked her to marry me? I, who am not worthy to polish the blade of her niblick! I, who have not even a thirty handicap, ask a girl to marry me who was in the semi-final of last year's Ladies' Open! No, no, Bates, I may be a *vers-libre* poet, but I have some sense of what is fitting. I love her, yes. I love her with a fervour which causes me to frequently and for hours at a time lie tossing sleeplessly upon my pillow. But I would not dare to ask her to marry me."

Anastatia burst into a peal of girlish laughter.

"You poor chump!" she cried. "Is that what has been the matter all this time? I couldn't make out what the trouble was."

THE HEART OF A GOOF

Why, I'm crazy about you. I'll marry you any time you give the word."

Rodney reeled.

"What!"

"Of course I will."

"Anastatia!"

"Rodney!"

He folded her in his arms.

"Well, I'm dashed," said William. "It looks to me as if I had been making rather a lot of silly fuss about nothing. Jane, I wronged you."

"It was my fault."

"No, no!"

"Yes, yes!"

"Jane!"

"William!"

He folded her in his arms. The two detectives, having entered the circumstances in their notebooks, looked at one another with moist eyes.

"Cyril!" said Mr. Brown.

"Reggie!" said Mr. Delancey.

Their hands met in a brotherly clasp.

"And so," concluded the Oldest Member, "all ended happily. The storm-tossed lives of William Bates, Jane Packard, and Rodney Spelvin came safely at long last into harbour. At the subsequent wedding William and Jane's present of a complete golfing outfit, including eight dozen new balls, a cloth cap, and a pair of spiked shoes, was generally admired by all who inspected the gifts during the reception."

"From that time forward the four of them have been inseparable. Rodney and Anastatia took a little cottage close to that of William and Jane, and rarely does a day pass without a close foursome between the two couples. William and Jane being steady tens and Anastatia scratch and Rodney a persevering eighteen, it makes an ideal match."

"What does?" asked the secretary, waking from his reverie.

"This one."

"Which?"

"I see," said the Oldest Member, sympathetically, "that your troubles, weighing on your mind, have caused you to follow my

drivers. After that first heavenly slosh I didn't seem able to do anything right."

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"Which?"

"I see," said the Oldest Member, sympathetically, "that your troubles, weighing on your mind, have caused you to follow my

THE HEART OF A GOOF

little narrative less closely than you might have done. Never mind, I will tell it again."

"The story" (said the Oldest Member) "which I am about to relate begins at a time when——"

THE END

Indiscretions of Archie

DEDICATION
To
B. W. KING-HALL

MY DEAR BUDDY,—

We have been friends for eighteen years. A considerable proportion of my books were written under your hospitable roof. And yet I have never dedicated one to you. What will be the verdict of Posterity on this? The fact is, I have become rather superstitious about dedications. No sooner do you label a book with the legend:—

TO
MY BEST FRIEND
X

than X cuts you in Piccadilly, or you bring a lawsuit against him. There is a fatality about it. However, I can't imagine anyone quarrelling with you, and I am getting more attractive all the time, so let's take a chance.

Yours ever,
P. G. WODEHOUSE.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| I Distressing Scene In An Hotel | 185 |
| II A Shock For Mr Brewster | 188 |
| III Mr Brewster Delivers Sentence | 192 |
| IV Work Wanted | 197 |
| V Strange Experiences Of An Artist's Model | 200 |
| VI The Bomb | 207 |
| VII Mr Roscoe Sherriff Has An Idea | 216 |
| VIII A Disturbed Night For Dear Old Squiffy | 224 |
| IX A Letter From Parker | 233 |
| X Doing Father A Bit Of Good | 241 |
| XI Salvatore Chooses The Wrong Moment | 251 |
| XII Bright Eyes – And A Fly | 257 |
| XIII Rallying Round Percy | 266 |
| XIV The Sad Case Of Looney Biddle | 276 |
| XV Summer Storms | 284 |
| XVI Archie Accepts A Situation | 295 |
| XVII Brother Bill's Romance | 301 |
| XVIII The Sausage Chappie | 306 |
| XIX Reggie Comes To Life | 313 |
| XX The Sausage Chappie Clicks | 327 |
| XXI The Growing Boy | 334 |
| XXII Washy Steps Into The Hall Of Fame | 344 |
| XXIII Mother's Knee | 352 |
| XXIV The Melting Of Mr Connolley | 361 |
| XXV The Wigmore Venus | 369 |
| XXVI A Tale Of A Grandfather | 378 |

CHAPTER I

DISTRESSING SCENE IN AN HOTEL

"I SAY, laddie!" said Archie.

"Sir?" replied the desk-clerk alertly. All the employees of the Hotel Cosmopolis were alert. It was one of the things on which Mr. Daniel Brewster, the proprietor, insisted. And as he was always wandering about the lobby of the hotel keeping a personal eye on affairs, it was never safe to relax.

"I want to see the manager."

"Is there anything I could do sir?"

Archie looked at him doubtfully.

"Well, as a matter of fact, my dear old desk-clerk," he said, "I want to kick up a fearful row, and it hardly seems fair to lug you into it. Why you, I mean to say? The blighter whose head I want on a charger is the bally manager."

At this point a massive, grey-haired man, who had been standing close by, gazing on the lobby with an air of restrained severity, as if daring it to start anything, joined in the conversation.

"I am the manager," he said.

His eye was cold and hostile. Others, it seemed to say, might like Archie Moffam, but not he. Daniel Brewster was bristling for combat. What he had overheard had shocked him to the core of his being. The Hotel Cosmopolis was his own private, personal property, and the thing dearest to him in the world, after his daughter Lucille. He prided himself on the fact that his hotel was not like other New York hotels, which were run by impersonal companies and shareholders and boards of directors, and consequently lacked the paternal touch which made the Cosmopolis what it was. At other hotels things went wrong, and clients complained. At the Cosmopolis things never went wrong, because he was on the spot to see that they didn't, and as a result clients never complained. Yet here was this long, thin, string-bean of an Englishman actually registering annoyance and dissatisfaction before his very eyes.

"What is your complaint?" he enquired frigidly.

Archie attached himself to the top button of Mr. Brewster's

coat, and was immediately dislodged by an irritable jerk of the other's substantial body.

"Listen, old thing! I came over to this country to nose about in search of a job, because there doesn't seem what you might call a general demand for my services in England. Directly I was demobbed, the family started talking about the Land of Opportunity and shot me on to a liner. The idea was that I might get hold of something in America——"

He got hold of Mr. Brewster's coat-button, and was again shaken off.

"Between ourselves, I've never done anything much in England, and I fancy the family were getting a bit fed. At any rate, they sent me over here——"

Mr. Brewster disentagled himself for the third time.

"I would prefer to postpone the story of your life," he said coldly, "and be informed what is your specific complaint against the Hotel Cosmopolis."

"Of course, yes. The jolly old hotel. I'm coming to that. Well, it was like this. A chappie on the boat told me that this was the best place to stop at in New York——"

"He was quite right," said Mr. Brewster.

"Was he, by Jove! Well, all I can say, then, is that the other New York hotels must be pretty mouldy, if this is the best of the lot! I took a room here last night," said Archie, quivering with self-pity, "and there was a beastly tap outside somewhere which went drip-drip-drip all night and kept me awake."

Mr. Brewster's annoyance deepened. He felt that a chink had been found in his armour. Not even the most paternal hotel-proprietor can keep an eye on every tap in his establishment.

"Drip-drip-drip!" repeated Archie firmly. "And I put my boots outside the door when I went to bed, and this morning they hadn't been touched. I give you my solemn word! Not touched."

"Naturally," said Mr. Brewster. "My employees are honest."

"But I wanted them cleaned dash, it!"

"There is a shoe-shining parlour in the basement. At the Cosmopolis shoes left outside bedroom doors are not cleaned."

"Then I think the Cosmopolis is a bally rotten hotel!"

Mr. Brewster's compact frame quivered. The unforgivable insult had been offered. Question the legitimacy of Mr. Brewster's parentage, knock Mr. Brewster down and walk on his face with spiked shoes, and you did not irremediably close all avenues to a

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

peaceful settlement. But make a remark like that about his hotel, and war was definitely declared.

"In that case," he said, stiffening, "I must ask you to give up your room."

"I'm going to give it up! I wouldn't stay in the bally place another minute."

Mr. Brewster walked away, and Archie charged round to the cashier's desk to get his bill. It had been his intention in any case, though for dramatic purposes he concealed it from his adversary, to leave the hotel that morning. One of the letters of introduction which he had brought over from England had resulted in an invitation from a Mrs. van Tuyl to her house-party at Miami, and he had decided to go there at once.

"Well," mused Archie, on his way to the station, "one thing's certain. I'll never set foot in *that* bally place again!"

But nothing in this world is certain.

CHAPTER II

A SHOCK FOR MR BREWSTER

MR. DANIEL BREWSTER sat in his luxurious suite at the Cosmopolis, smoking one of his admirable cigars and chatting with his old friend, Professor Binstead. A stranger who had only encountered Mr. Brewster in the lobby of the hotel would have been surprised at the appearance of his sitting-room, for it had none of the rugged simplicity which was the keynote of its owner's personal appearance. Daniel Brewster was a man with a hobby. He was what Parker, his valet, termed a connoozer. His educated taste in Art was one of the things which went to make the Cosmopolis different from and superior to other New York hotels. He had personally selected the tapestries in the dining-room and the various paintings throughout the building. And in his private capacity he was an enthusiastic collector of things which Professor Binstead, whose tastes lay in the same direction, would have stolen without a twinge of conscience if he could have got the chance.

The professor, a small man in middle age who wore tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles, flitted covetously about the room, inspecting its treasures with a glistening eye. In a corner, Parker, a grave, lean individual, bent over the chafing-dish in which he was preparing for his employer and his guest their simple lunch.

"Brewster," said Professor Binstead, pausing at the mantelpiece.

Mr. Brewster looked up amiably. He was in placid mood to-day. Two weeks and more had passed since the meeting with Archie recorded in the previous chapter, and he had been able to dismiss that disturbing affair from his mind. Since then, everything had gone splendidly with Daniel Brewster, for he had just accomplished his ambition of the moment by completing the negotiations for the purchase of a site further down-town, on which he proposed to erect a new hotel. He liked building hotels. He had the Cosmopolis, his first-born, a summer hotel in the mountains, purchased in the previous year, and he was toying with the idea of running over to England and putting up another in London. That, however, would have to wait. Meanwhile, he would concentrate on this new one down-town. It had kept him busy and worried,

arranging for securing the site; but his troubles were over now.

"Yes?" he said.

Professor Binstead had picked up a small china figure of delicate workmanship. It represented a warrior of pre-khaki days advancing with a spear upon some adversary who, judging from the contented expression on the warrior's face, was smaller than himself.

"Where did you get this?"

"That? Mawson, my agent, found it in a little shop on the east side."

"Where's the other? There ought to be another. These things go in pairs. They're valueless alone."

Mr. Brewster's brow clouded.

"I know that," he said shortly. "Mawson's looking for the other one everywhere. If you happen across it, I give you *carte blanche* to buy it for me."

"It must be somewhere."

"Yes. If you find it, don't worry about the expense. I'll settle up, no matter what it is."

"I'll bear it in mind," said Professor Binstead. "It may cost you a lot of money. I suppose you know that."

"I told you I don't care what it costs."

"It's nice to be a millionaire," sighed Professor Binstead.

"Luncheon is served, sir," said Parker.

He had stationed himself in a statuesque pose behind Mr. Brewster's chair, when there was a knock at the door. He went to the door, and returned with a telegram.

"Telegram for you, sir."

Mr. Brewster nodded carelessly. The contents of the chafing-dish had justified the advance advertising of their odour, and he was too busy to be interrupted.

"Put it down. And you needn't wait, Parker."

"Very good, sir."

The valet withdrew, and Mr. Brewster resumed his lunch.

"Aren't you going to open it?" asked Professor Binstead, to whom a telegram was a telegram.

"It can wait. I get them all day long. I expect it's from Lucille, saying what train she's making."

"She returns to-day?"

"Yes. Been at Miami." Mr. Brewster, having dwelt at adequate length on the contents of the chafing-dish, adjusted his glasses and took up the envelope. "I shall be glad—— Great Godfrey!"

He sat staring at the telegram, his mouth open. His friend eyed him solicitously.

"No bad news, I hope?"

Mr. Brewster gurgled in a strangled way.

"Bad news? Bad——? Here, read it for yourself."

Professor Binstead, one of the three most inquisitive men in New York, took the slip of paper with gratitude.

"'Returning New York to-day with darling Archie,' he read. 'Lots of love from us both. Lucille.'" He gaped at his host. "Who is Archie?" he enquired.

"Who is Archie?" echoed Mr. Brewster helplessly. "Who is——? That's just what I would like to know."

"'Darling Archie,'" murmured the professor, musing over the telegram. "'Returning to-day with darling Archie.' Strange!"

Mr. Brewster continued to stare before him. When you send your only daughter on a visit to Miami minus any entanglements and she mentions in a telegram that she has acquired a darling Archie, you are naturally startled. He rose from the table with a bound. It had occurred to him that by neglecting a careful study of his mail during the past week, as was his bad habit when busy, he had lost an opportunity of keeping abreast with current happenings. He recollected now that a letter had arrived from Lucille some time ago, and that he had put it away unopened till he should have leisure to read it. Lucille was a dear girl, he had felt, but her letters when on a vacation seldom contained anything that couldn't wait a few days for a reading. He sprang for his desk, rummaged among his papers, and found what he was seeking.

It was a long letter, and there was silence in the room for some moments while he mastered its contents. Then he turned to the professor, breathing heavily.

"Good heavens!"

"Yes?" said Professor Binstead eagerly. "Yes?"

"Good Lord!"

"Well?"

"Good gracious!"

"What is it?" demanded the professor in an agony.

Mr. Brewster sat down again with a thud.

"She's married!"

"Married!"

"Married! To an Englishman!"

"Bless my soul!"

"She says," proceeded Mr. Brewster, referring to the letter again, "that they were both so much in love that they simply had to slip off and get married, and she hopes I won't be cross. Cross!" gasped Mr. Brewster, gazing wildly at his friend.

"Very disturbing!"

"Disturbing! You bet it's disturbing! I don't know anything about the fellow. Never heard of him in my life. She says he wanted a quiet wedding because he thought a fellow looked such a chump getting married! And I must love him, because he's all set to love me very much!"

"Extraordinary!"

Mr. Brewster put the letter down.

"An Englishman!"

"I have met some very agreeable Englishmen," said Professor Binstead.

"I don't like Englishmen," growled Mr. Brewster. "Parker's an Englishman."

"Your valet?"

"Yes. I believe he wears my shirts on the sly," said Mr. Brewster broodingly. "If I catch him——! What would you do about this, Binstead?"

"Do?" The professor considered the point judicially. "Well, really, Brewster, I do not see that there is anything you can do. You must simply wait and meet the man. Perhaps he will turn out an admirable son-in-law."

"H'm!" Mr. Brewster declined to take an optimistic view. "But an Englishman, Binstead!" he said with pathos. "Why," he went on, memory suddenly stirring, "there was an Englishman at this hotel only a week or two ago who went about knocking it in a way that would have amazed you! Said it was a rotten place! *My* hotel!"

Professor Binstead clicked his tongue sympathetically. He understood his friend's warmth.

CHAPTER III

MR BREWSTER DELIVERS SENTENCE

AT about the same moment that Professor Binstead was clicking his tongue in Mr. Brewster's sitting-room, Archie Moffam sat contemplating his bride in a drawing-room on the express from Miami. He was thinking that this was too good to be true. His brain had been in something of a whirl these last few days, but this was one thought that never failed to emerge clearly from the welter.

Mrs. Archie Moffam, *nee* Lucille Brewster, was small and slender. She had a little animated face, set in a cloud of dark hair. She was so altogether perfect that Archie had frequently found himself compelled to take the marriage-certificate out of his inside pocket and study it furtively, to make himself realise that this miracle of good fortune had actually happened to him.

"Honestly, old bean—I mean, dear old thing,—I mean, darling," said Archie, "I can't believe it!"

"What?"

"What I mean is, I can't understand why you should have married a blighter like me."

Lucille's eyes opened. She squeezed his hand.

"Why, you're the most wonderful thing in the world, precious! Surely you know that?"

"Absolutely escaped my notice. Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! You wonder-child! Nobody could see you without loving you!"

Archie heaved an ecstatic sigh. Then a thought crossed his mind. It was a thought which frequently came to mar his bliss.

"I say, I wonder if your father will think that!"

"Of course he will!"

"We've rather sprung this, as it were, on the old lad," said Archie, dubiously. "What sort of a man is your father?"

"Father's a darling, too."

"Rummy thing he should own that hotel," said Archie. "I had a frightful row with a blighter of a manager there just before I left for Miami. Your father ought to sack that chap. He was a blot on the landscape!"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

It had been settled by Lucille during the journey that Archie should be broken gently to his father-in-law. That is to say, instead of bounding blithely into Mr. Brewster's presence hand in hand, the happy pair should separate for half an hour or so, Archie hanging around in the offing while Lucille saw her father and told him the whole story, or those chapters of it which she had omitted from her letter for want of space. Then, having impressed Mr. Brewster sufficiently with his luck in having acquired Archie for a son-in-law, she would lead him to where his bit of good fortune awaited him.

The programme worked out admirably in its earlier stages. When the two emerged from Mr. Brewster's room to meet Archie, Mr. Brewster's general idea was that fortune had smiled upon him in an almost unbelievable fashion and had presented him with a son-in-law who combined in almost equal parts the more admirable characteristics of Apollo, Sir Galahad, and Marcus Aurelius. True, he had gathered in the course of the conversation that dear Archie had no occupation and no private means; but Mr. Brewster felt that a great-souled man like Archie didn't need them. You can't have everything, and Archie, according to Lucille's account, was practically a hundred per cent. man in soul, looks, manners, amiability, and breeding. These are the things that count. Mr. Brewster proceeded to the lobby in a glow of optimism and geniality.

Consequently, when he perceived Archie, he got a bit of a shock.

"Hullo-ullo-ullo!" said Archie, advancing happily.

"Archie, darling, this is father," said Lucille.

"Good Lord!" said Archie.

There was one of those silences. Mr. Brewster looked at Archie. Archie gazed at Mr. Brewster. Lucille, perceiving without understanding why that the big introduction scene had stubbed its toe on some unlooked-for obstacle, waited anxiously for enlightenment. Meanwhile, Archie continued to inspect Mr. Brewster, and Mr. Brewster continued to drink in Archie.

After an awkward pause of about three and a quarter minutes, Mr. Brewster swallowed once or twice, and finally spoke.

"Lu!"

"Yes, father?"

"Is this true?"

Lucille's grey eyes clouded with perplexity and apprehension.

"True?"

"Have you really inflicted this—*this* on me for a son-in-law?" Mr. Brewster swallowed a few more times. Archie the while watching with a frozen fascination the rapid shimmying of his new relative's Adam's-apple. "Go away! I want to have a few words alone with this—this—*wassyourdamname*?" he demanded, in an overwrought manner, addressing Archie for the first time.

"I told you, father. It's Moom."

"Moom?"

"It's spelt M-o-f-f-a-m, but pronounced Moom."

"To rhyme," said Archie, helpfully, "with Bluffinghame."

"Lu," said Mr. Brewster, "run away! I want to speak to—to—to—"

"You called me *this* before," said Archie.

"You aren't angry, father, dear?" said Lucille.

"Oh no! Oh no! I'm tickled to death!"

When his daughter had withdrawn, Mr. Brewster drew a long breath.

"Now, then!" he said.

"Bit embarrassing, all this, what!" said Archie, chattily "I mean to say, having met before in less happy circs. and what not. Rum coincidence and so forth! How would it be to bury the jolly old hatchet—start a new life—forgive and forget—learn to love each other—and all that sort of rot? I'm game if you are. How do we go? Is it a bet?"

Mr. Brewster remained entirely unsoftened by this manly appeal to his better feelings.

"What the devil do you mean by marrying my daughter?"

Archie reflected.

"Well, it sort of happened, don't you know! You know how these things *are*! Young yourself once, and all that. I was most frightfully in love, and Lu seemed to think it wouldn't be a bad scheme, and one thing led to another, and—well, there you are, don't you know!"

"And I suppose you think you've done pretty well for yourself?"

"Oh, absolutely! As far as I'm concerned, everything's topping! I've never felt so braced in my life!"

"Yes!" said Mr. Brewster, with bitterness. "I suppose, from your view-point, everything is 'topping'. You haven't a cent to your name, and you've managed to fool a rich man's daughter into marrying you. I suppose you looked me up in Bradstreet before committing yourself?"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

This aspect of the matter had not struck Archie until this moment.

"I say!" he observed, with dismay. "I never looked at it like that before! I can see that, from your point of view, this must look like a bit of a wash-out!"

"How do you propose to support Lucille, anyway?"

Archie ran a finger round the inside of his collar. He felt embarrassed. His father-in-law was opening up all kinds of new lines of thought.

"Well, there, old bean," he admitted, frankly, "you rather have me!" He turned the matter over for a moment. "I had a sort of idea of, as it were, working, if you know what I mean."

"Working at what?"

"Now, there again you stump me somewhat! The general scheme was that I should kind of look round, you know, and nose about and buzz to and fro till something turned up. That was, broadly speaking, the notion!"

"And how did you suppose my daughter was to live while you were doing all this?"

"Well, I think," said Archie, "*I think* we rather expected you to rally round a bit for the nonce!"

"I see! You expected to live on me?"

"Well, you put it a bit crudely, but—as far as I had mapped anything out—that *was* what you might call the general scheme of procedure. You don't think much of it, what? Yes? No?"

Mr. Brewster exploded.

"No! I do not think much of it! Good God! You go out of my hotel—*my* hotel—calling it all the names you could think of—roasting it to beat the band——"

"Trifle hasty!" murmured Archie, apologetically. "Spoke without thinking. Dashed tap had gone *drip-drip-drip* all night—kept me awake—hadn't had breakfast—bygones be bygones——!"

"Don't interrupt! I say, you go out of my hotel, knocking it as no one has ever knocked it since it was built, and you sneak straight off and marry my daughter without my knowledge."

"Did think of wiring for blessing. Slipped the old bean, somehow. You know how one forgets things!"

"And now you come back and calmly expect me to fling my arms round you and kiss you, and support you for the rest of your life!"

"Only while I'm nosing about and buzzing to and fro."

"Well, I suppose I've got to support you. There seems no way out of it. I'll tell you exactly what I propose to do. You think my hotel is a pretty poor hotel, eh? Well, you'll have plenty of opportunity of judging, because you're coming to live here. I'll let you have a suite and I'll let you have your meals, but outside of that—nothing doing! Nothing doing! Do you understand what I mean?"

"Absolutely! You mean 'Napoo!' "

"You can sign bills for a reasonable amount in my restaurant, and the hotel will look after your laundry. But not a cent do you get out of me. And, if you want your shoes shined, you can pay for it yourself in the basement. If you leave them outside your door, I'll instruct the floor-waiter to throw them down the airshaft. Do you understand? Good! Now, is there anything more you want to ask?"

Archie smiled a propitiatory smile.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was going to ask if you would stagger along and have a bite with us in the grill-room?"

"I will not!"

"I'll sign the bill," said Archie, ingratiatingly. "You don't think much of it? Oh, right-o!"

CHAPTER IV

WORK WANTED

IT SEEMED to Archie, as he surveyed his position at the end of the first month of his married life, that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. In their attitude towards America, visiting Englishmen almost invariably incline to extremes, either detesting all that therein is or else becoming enthusiasts on the subject of the country, its climate, and its institutions. Archie belonged to the second class. He liked America and got on splendidly with Americans from the start. He was a friendly soul, a mixer; and in New York, that city of mixers, he found himself at home. The atmosphere of good-fellowship and the openhearted hospitality of everybody he met appealed to him. There were moments when it seemed to him as though New York had simply been waiting for him to arrive before giving the word to let the revels commence.

Nothing, of course, in this world is perfect; and, rosy as were the glasses through which Archie looked on his new surroundings, he had to admit that there was one flaw, one fly in the ointment, one individual caterpillar in the salad. Mr. Daniel Brewster, his father-in-law, remained consistently unfriendly. Indeed, his manner towards his new relative became daily more and more a manner which would have caused gossip on the plantation if Simon Legree had exhibited it in his relations with Uncle Tom. And this in spite of the fact that Archie, as early as the third morning of his stay, had gone to him and in the most frank and manly way had withdrawn his criticism of the Hotel Cosmopolis, giving it as his considered opinion that the Hotel Cosmopolis on closer inspection appeared to be a good egg, one of the best and brightest, and a bit of all right.

"A credit to you, old thing," said Archie cordially.

"Don't call me old thing!" growled Mr. Brewster.

"Right-o, old companion!" said Archie amiably.

Archie, a true philosopher, bore this hostility with fortitude, but it worried Lucille.

"I do wish father understood you better," was her wistful comment when Archie had related the conversation.

"Well, you know," said Archie, "I'm open for being understood any time he cares to take a stab at it."

"You must try and make him fond of you."

"But how? I smile winsomely at him and what not, but he doesn't respond."

"Well, we shall have to think of something. I want him to realise what an angel you are. You *are* an angel, you know."

"No, really?"

"Of course you are."

"It's a rummy thing," said Archie, pursuing a train of thought which was constantly with him, "the more I see of you, the more I wonder how you can have a father like—I mean to say, what I mean to say is, I wish I had known your mother she must have been frightfully attractive."

"What would really please him, I know," said Lucille, "would be if you got some work to do. He loves people who work."

"Yes?" said Archie doubtfully. "Well, you know, I heard him interviewing that chappie behind the desk this morning, who works like the dickens from early morn to dewy eve, on the subject of a mistake in his figures; and if he loved him, he dissembled it all right. Of course, I admit that so far I haven't been one of the toilers, but the dashed difficult thing is to know how to start. I'm nosing round, but the openings for a bright young man seem so scarce."

"Well, keep on trying. I feel sure that, if you could only find something to do, it doesn't matter what, father would be quite different."

It was possibly the dazzling prospect of making Mr. Brewster quite different that stimulated Archie. He was strongly of the opinion that any change in his father-in-law must inevitably be for the better. A chance meeting with James B. Wheeler, the artist, at the Pen-and-Ink Club seemed to open the way.

To a visitor to New York who has the ability to make himself liked it almost appears as though the leading industry in that city was the issuing of two-weeks' invitation-cards to clubs. Archie since his arrival had been showered with these pleasant evidences of his popularity; and he was now an honorary member of so many clubs of various kinds that he had not time to go to them all. There were the fashionable clubs along Fifth Avenue to which his friend Reggie van Tuyl, son of his Florida hostess, had introduced him. There were the business-men's clubs of which he was

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

made free by more solid citizens. And, best of all, there were the Lambs', the Players', the Friars', the Coffee-House, the Pen-and-Ink, and the other resorts of the artist, the author, the actor, and the Bohemian. It was in these that Archie spent most of his time, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of J. B. Wheeler, the popular illustrator.

To Mr. Wheeler, over a friendly lunch, Archie had been confiding some of his ambitions to qualify as the hero of one of the Get-on-or-get-out-young-man-step-lively books.

"You want a job?" said Mr. Wheeler.

"I want a job," said Archie.

Mr. Wheeler consumed eight fried potatoes in quick succession. He was an able trencherman.

"I always looked on you as one of our leading lilies of the field," he said. "Why this anxiety to toil and spin?"

"Well, my wife, you know, seems to think it might put me one up with the jolly old dad if I did something."

"And you're not particular what you do, so long as it has the outer aspect of work?"

"Anything in the world, laddie, anything in the world."

"Then come and pose for a picture I'm doing," said J. B. Wheeler. "It's for a magazine cover. You're just the model I want, and I'll pay you at the usual rates. Is it a go?"

"Pose?"

"You've only got to stand still and look like a chunk of wood. You can do that, surely?"

"I can do that," said Archie.

"Then come along down to my studio tomorrow."

"Right-o!" said Archie.

CHAPTER V

STRANGE EXPERIENCES OF AN ARTIST'S MODEL

"I SAY, old thing!"

Archie spoke plaintively. Already he was looking back ruefully to the time when he had supposed that an artist's model had a soft job. In the first five minutes muscles which he had not been aware that he possessed had started to ache like neglected teeth. His respect for the toughness and durability of artists' models was now solid. How they acquired the stamina to go through this sort of thing all day and then bound off to Bohemian revels at night was more than he could understand.

"Don't wobble, confound you!" snorted Mr. Wheeler.

"Yes, but, my dear old artist," said Archie, "what you don't seem to grasp—what you appear not to realise—is that I'm getting a crick in the back."

"You weakling! You miserable, invertebrate worm! Move an inch and I'll murder you, and come and dance on your grave every Wednesday and Saturday. I'm just getting it."

"It's in the spine that it seems to catch me principally."

"Be a man, you faint-hearted string-bean!" urged J. B. Wheeler. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why, a girl who was posing for me last week stood for a solid hour on one leg, holding a tennis racket over her head and smiling brightly withal."

"The female of the species is more indiarubbery than the male," argued Archie.

"Well, I'll be through in a few minutes. Don't weaken. Think how proud you'll be when you see yourself on all the bookstalls."

Archie sighed, and braced himself to the task once more. He wished he had never taken on this binge. In addition to his physical discomfort, he was feeling a most awful chump. The cover on which Mr. Wheeler was engaged was for the August number of the magazine, and it had been necessary for Archie to drape his reluctant form in a two-piece bathing suit of a vivid lemon colour; for he was supposed to be representing one of those jolly dogs belonging to the best families who dine off floats at exclusive seashore resorts. J. B. Wheeler, a stickler for accuracy,

had wanted him to remove his socks and shoes; but there Archie stood firm. He was willing to make an ass of himself, but not a silly ass.

"All right," said J. B. Wheeler, laying down his brush. "That will do for to-day. Though, speaking without prejudice and with no wish to be offensive, if I had had a model who wasn't a weak-kneed, jelly-backboned son of Belial, I could have got the darned thing finished without having to have another sitting."

"I wonder why you chappies call this sort of thing 'sitting,' " said Archie, pensively, as he conducted tentative experiments in osteopathy on his aching back. "I say, old thing, I could do with a restorative, if you have one handy. But, of course, you haven't, I suppose," he added, resignedly. Abstemious as a rule, there were moments when Archie found the Eighteenth Amendment somewhat trying.

J. B. Wheeler shook his head.

"You're a little previous," he said. "But come round in another day or so, and I may be able to do something for you." He moved with a certain conspirator-like caution to a corner of the room, and, lifting to one side a pile of canvases, revealed a stout barrel, which he regarded with a fatherly and benignant eye. "I don't mind telling you that, in the fullness of time, I believe this is going to spread a good deal of sweetness and light."

"Oh, ah," said Archie, interested. "Homebrew, what?"

"Made with these hands. I added a few more raisins yesterday, to speed things up a bit. There is much virtue in your raisin. And, talking of speeding things up, for goodness' sake try to be a bit more punctual to-morrow. We lost an hour of good daylight to-day."

"I like that! I was here on the absolute minute. I had to hang about on the landing waiting for you."

"Well, well, that doesn't matter," said J. B. Wheeler, impatiently, for the artist soul is always annoyed by petty details. "The point is that we were an hour late in getting to work. Mind you're here to-morrow at eleven sharp."

It was, therefore, with a feeling of guilt and trepidation that Archie mounted the stairs on the following morning; for in spite of his good resolutions he was half an hour behind time. He was relieved to find that his friend had also lagged by the wayside. The door of the studio was ajar, and he went in, to discover the

place occupied by a lady of mature years, who was scrubbing the floor with a mop. He went into the bedroom and donned his bathing suit. When he emerged, ten minutes later, the charwoman had gone, but J. B. Wheeler was still absent. Rather glad of the respite, he sat down to kill time by reading the morning paper, whose sporting page alone he had managed to master at the breakfast table.

There was not a great deal in the paper to interest him. The usual bond-robbery had taken place on the previous day, and the police were reported hot on the trail of the Master-Mind who was alleged to be at the back of these financial operations. A messenger named Henry Babcock had been arrested and was expected to become confidential. To one who, like Archie, had never owned a bond, the story made little appeal. He turned with more interest to a cheery half-column on the activities of a gentleman in Minnesota who, with what seemed to Archie, as he thought of Mr. Daniel Brewster, a good deal of resource and public spirit, had recently beamed his father-in-law with the family meat-axe. It was only after he had read this through twice in a spirit of gentle approval that it occurred to him that J. B. Wheeler was uncommonly late at the tryst. He looked at his watch, and found that he had been in the studio three-quarters of an hour.

Archie became restless. Long-suffering old bean though he was, he considered this a bit thick. He got up and went out on to the landing, to see if there were any signs of the blighter. There were none. He began to understand now what had happened. For some reason or other the bally artist was not coming to the studio at all that day. Probably he had called up the hotel and left a message to this effect, and Archie had just missed it. Another man might have waited to make certain that his message had reached its destination, but not woollen-headed Wheeler, the most casual individual in New York. Thoroughly aggrieved, Archie turned back to the studio to dress and go away.

His progress was stayed by a solid, forbidding slab of oak. Somehow or other, since he had left the room, the door had managed to get itself shut.

"Oh, dash it!" said Archie.

The mildness of the expletive was proof that the full horror of the situation had not immediately come home to him. His mind in the first few moments was occupied with the problem of how the door had got that way. He could not remember shutting it.

Probably he had done it unconsciously. As a child, he had been taught by sedulous elders that the little gentleman always closed doors behind him, and presumably his subconscious self was still under the influence. And then, suddenly, he realised that this infernal, officious ass of a subconscious self had deposited him right in the gumbo. Behind that closed door, unattainable as youthful ambition, lay his gent's heather-mixture with the green twill, and here he was, out in the world, alone, in a lemon-coloured bathing suit.

In all crises of human affairs there are two broad courses open to a man. He can stay where he is or he can go elsewhere. Archie, leaning on the banisters, examined these alternatives narrowly. If he stayed where he was he would have to spend the night on this dashed landing. If he legged it, in this kit, he would be gathered up by the constabulary before he had gone a hundred yards. He was no pessimist, but he was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that he was up against it.

It was while he was musing with a certain tenseness on these things that the sound of footsteps came to him from below. But almost in the first instant the hope that this might be J. B. Wheeler, the curse of the human race, died away. Whoever was coming up the stairs was running, and J. B. Wheeler never ran upstairs. He was not one of your lean, haggard, spiritual-looking geniuses. He made a large income with his brush and pencil, and spent most of it in creature comforts. This couldn't be J. B. Wheeler.

It was not. It was a tall, thin man whom he had never seen before. He appeared to be in a considerable hurry. He let himself into the studio on the floor below, and vanished without even waiting to shut the door.

He had come and disappeared in almost record time, but, brief though his passing had been, it had been long enough to bring consolation to Archie. A sudden bright light had been vouchsafed to Archie, and he now saw an admirably ripe and fruity scheme for ending his troubles. What could be simpler than to toddle down one flight of stairs and in an easy and debonair manner ask the chappie's permission to use his telephone? And what could be simpler, once he was at the 'phone, than to get in touch with somebody at the Cosmopolis who would send down a few trousers and what not in a kit bag. It was a priceless solution, thought Archie, as he made his way downstairs. Not even embarrassing, he meant to say. This chappie, living in a place like

this, wouldn't bat an eyelid at the spectacle of a fellow trickling about the place in a bathing suit. They would have a good laugh about the whole thing.

"I say, I hate to bother you—dare say you're busy and all that sort of thing—but would you mind if I popped in for half a second and used your 'phone?"

That was the speech, the extremely gentlemanly and well-phrased speech, which Archie had prepared to deliver the moment the man appeared. The reason he did not deliver it was that the man did not appear. He knocked, but nothing stirred.

"I say!"

Archie now perceived that the door was ajar, and that on an envelope attached with a tack to one of the panels was the name "Elmer M. Moon." He pushed the door a little farther open and tried again.

"Oh, Mr. Moon! Mr. Moon!" He waited a moment. "Oh, Mr. Moon! Mr. Moon! Are you there, Mr. Moon?"

He blushed hotly. To his sensitive ear the words had sounded exactly like the opening line of the refrain of a vaudeville song-hit. He decided to waste no further speech on a man with such an unfortunate surname until he could see him face to face and get a chance of lowering his voice a bit. Absolutely absurd to stand outside a chappie's door singing song-hits in a lemon-coloured bathing suit. He pushed the door open and walked in; and his subconscious self, always the gentleman, closed it gently behind him.

"Up!" said a low, sinister, harsh, unfriendly, and unpleasant voice.

"Eh?" said Archie, revolving sharply on his axis.

He found himself confronting the hurried gentleman who had run upstairs. This sprinter had produced an automatic pistol, and was pointing it in a truculent manner at his head. Archie stared at his host, and his host stared at him.

"Put your hands up," he said.

"Oh, right-o! Absolutely!" said Archie. "But I mean to say——"

The other was drinking him in with considerable astonishment. Archie's costume seemed to have made a powerful impression upon him.

"Who the devil are you?" he enquired.

"Me? Oh, my name's——"

"Never mind your name. What are you doing here?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I popped in to ask if I might use your 'phone. You see——"

A certain relief seemed to temper the austerity of the other's gaze. As a visitor, Archie, though surprising, seemed to be better than he had expected.

"I don't know what to do with you," he said, meditatively.

"If you'd just let me toddle to the 'phone——"

"Likely!" said the man. He appeared to reach a decision.

"Here, go into that room."

He indicated with a jerk of his head the open door of what was apparently a bedroom at the farther end of the studio.

"I take it," said Archie, chattily, "that all this may seem to you not a little rummy."

"Get on!"

"I was only saying——"

"Well, I haven't time to listen. Get a move on!"

The bedroom was in a state of untidiness which eclipsed anything which Archie had ever witnessed. The other appeared to be moving house. Bed, furniture, and floor were covered with articles of clothing. A silk shirt wreathed itself about Archie's ankles as he stood gaping, and, as he moved farther into the room, his path was paved with ties and collars.

"Sit down!" said Elmer M. Moon, abruptly.

"Right-o! Thanks," said Archie. "I suppose you wouldn't like me to explain, and what not, what?"

"No!" said Mr. Moon. "I haven't got your spare time. Put your hands behind that chair."

Archie did so, and found them immediately secured by what felt like a silk tie. His assiduous host then proceeded to fasten his ankles in a like manner. This done, he seemed to feel that he had done all that was required of him, and he returned to the packing of a large suit-case which stood by the window.

"I say!" said Archie.

Mr. Moon, with the air of a man who has remembered something which he had overlooked, shoved a sock in his guest's mouth and resumed his packing. He was what might be called an impressionist packer. His aim appeared to be speed rather than neatness. He bundled his belongings in, closed the bag with some difficulty, and, stepping to the window, opened it. Then he climbed out on to the fire-escape, dragged the suit-case after him, and was gone.

Archie, left alone, addressed himself to the task of freeing his prisoned limbs. The job proved much easier than he had expected. Mr. Moon, that hustler, had wrought for the moment, not for all time. A practical man, he had been content to keep his visitor shackled merely for such a period as would permit him to make his escape unhindered. In less than ten minutes Archie, after a good deal of snake-like writhing, was pleased to discover that the thingummy attached to his wrists had loosened sufficiently to enable him to use his hands. He untied himself and got up.

He now began to tell himself that out of evil cometh good. His encounter with the elusive Mr. Moon had not been an agreeable one, but it had had this solid advantage, that it had left him right in the middle of a great many clothes. And Mr. Moon, whatever his moral defects, had the one excellent quality of taking about the same size as himself. Archie, casting a covetous eye upon a tweed suit which lay on the bed, was on the point of climbing into the trousers when on the outer door of the studio there sounded a forceful knocking.

"Open up here!"

CHAPTER VI

THE BOMB

ARCHIE bounded silently out into the other room and stood listening tensely. He was not a naturally querulous man, but he did feel at this point that Fate was picking on him with a somewhat undue severity.

"In th' name av th' Law!"

There are times when the best of us lose our heads. At this juncture Archie should undoubtedly have gone to the door, opened it, explained his presence in a few well-chosen words, and generally have passed the whole thing off with ready tact. But the thought of confronting a posse of police in his present costume caused him to look earnestly about him for a hiding-place.

Up against the farther wall was a settee with a high, arching back, which might have been put there for that special purpose. He inserted himself behind this, just as a splintering crash announced that the Law, having gone through the formality of knocking with its knuckles, was now getting busy with an axe. A moment later the door had given way, and the room was full of trampling feet. Archie wedged himself against the wall with the quiet concentration of a clam nestling in its shell, and hoped for the best.

It seemed to him that his immediate future depended for better or for worse entirely on the native intelligence of the Force. If they were the bright, alert men he hoped they were, they would see all that junk in the bedroom and, deducing from it that their quarry had stood not upon the order of his going but had hopped it, would not waste time in searching a presumably empty apartment. If, on the other hand, they were the obtuse, flat-footed persons who occasionally find their way into the ranks of even the most enlightened constabularies, they would undoubtedly shift the settee and drag him into a publicity from which his modest soul shrank. He was enchanted, therefore, a few moments later, to hear a gruff voice state that th' mutt had beaten it down th' fire-escape. His opinion of the detective abilities of the New York police force rose with a bound.

There followed a brief council of war, which, as it took place in the bedroom, was inaudible to Archie except as a distant growling

noise. He could distinguish no words, but, as it was succeeded by a general trampling of large boots in the direction of the door and then by silence, he gathered that the pack, having drawn the studio and found it empty, had decided to return to other and more profitable duties. He gave them a reasonable interval for removing themselves, and then poked his head cautiously over the settee.

All was peace. The place was empty. No sound disturbed the stillness.

Archie emerged. For the first time in this morning of disturbing occurrences he began to feel that God was in his heaven and all right with the world. At last things were beginning to brighten up a bit, and life might be said to have taken on some of the aspects of a good egg. He stretched himself, for it is cramping work lying under settees, and, proceeding to the bedroom, picked up the tweed trousers again.

Clothes had a fascination for Archie. Another man, in similar circumstances, might have hurried over his toilet; but Archie, faced by a difficult choice of ties, rather strung the thing out. He selected a specimen which did great credit to the taste of Mr. Moon, evidently one of our snappiest dressers, found that it did not harmonise with the deeper meaning of the tweed suit, removed it, chose another, and was adjusting the bow and admiring the effect, when his attention was diverted by a slight sound which was half a cough and half a sniff; and, turning, found himself gazing into the clear blue eyes of a large man in uniform, who had stepped into the room from the fire-escape. He was swinging a substantial club in a negligent sort of way, and he looked at Archie with a total absence of bonhomie.

"Ah!" he observed.

"Oh, *there* you are!" said Archie, subsiding weakly against the chest of drawers. He gulped. "Of course, I can see you're thinking all this pretty tolerably weird and all that," he proceeded, in a propitiatory voice.

The policeman attempted no analysis of his emotions. He opened a mouth which a moment before had looked incapable of being opened except with the assistance of powerful machinery and shouted a single word.

"Cassidy!"

A distant voice gave tongue in answer. It was like alligators roaring to their mates across lonely swamps.

There was a rumble of footsteps in the region of the stairs, and

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

presently there entered an even larger guardian of the Law than the first exhibit. He, too, swung a massive club, and, like his colleague, he gazed frostily at Archie.

"God save Ireland!" he remarked.

The words appeared to be more in the nature of an expletive than a practical comment on the situation. Having uttered them, he draped himself in the doorway like a colossus, and chewed gum.

"Where ja get him?" he enquired, after a pause.

"Found him in here attimpting to disguise himself."

"I told Cap. he was hiding somewheres, but he would have it that he'd beat it down th' escape," said the gum-chewer, with the sombre triumph of the underling whose sound advice has been overruled by those above him. He shifted his wholesome (or, as some say, unwholesome) morsel to the other side of his mouth, and for the first time addressed Archie directly. "Ye're pinched!" he observed.

Archie started violently. The bleak directness of the speech roused him with a jerk from the dream-like state into which he had fallen. He had not anticipated this. He had assumed that there would be a period of tedious explanations to be gone through before he was at liberty to depart to the cosy little lunch for which his interior had been sighing wistfully this long time past; but that he should be arrested had been outside his calculations. Of course, he could put everything right eventually; he could call witnesses to his character and the purity of his intentions; but in the meantime the whole dashed business would be in all the papers, embellished with all those unpleasant flippancies to which your newspaper reporter is so prone to stoop when he sees half a chance. He would feel a frightful chump. Chappies would rot him about it to the most fearful extent. Old Brewster's name would come into it, and he could not disguise it from himself that his father-in-law, who liked his name in the papers as little as possible, would be sorer than a sunburned neck.

"No, I say, you know! I mean, I mean to say!"

"Pinched!" repeated the rather larger policeman.

"And annything ye say," added his slightly smaller colleague, "will be used agenst ya 't the trial."

"And if ya try t'escape," said the first speaker, twiddling his club, "ya'll getja block knocked off."

And, having sketched out this admirably clear and neatly-constructed scenario, the two relapsed into silence. Officer Cassidy

restored his gum to circulation. Officer Donahue frowned sternly at his boots.

"But, I say," said Archie, "it's all a mistake you know. Absolutely a frightful error, my dear old constables. I'm not the lad you're after at all. The chappie you want is a different sort of fellow altogether. Another blighter entirely."

New York policemen never laugh when on duty. There is probably something in the regulations against it. But Officer Donahue permitted the left corner of his mouth to twitch slightly, and a momentary muscular spasm disturbed the calm of Officer Cassidy's granite features, as a passing breeze ruffles the surface of some bottomless lake.

"That's what they all say!" observed Officer Donahue.

"It's no use tryin' that line of talk," said Officer Cassidy. "Babcock's squealed."

"Sure. Squealed 's morning," said Officer Donahue.

Archie's memory stirred vaguely.

"Babcock?" he said. "Do you know, that name seems familiar to me, somehow. I'm almost sure I've read it in the paper or something."

"Ah, cut it out!" said Officer Cassidy, disgustedly. The two constables exchanged a glance of austere disapproval. This hypocrisy pained them. "Read it in th' paper or something!"

"By Jove! I remember now. He's the chappie who was arrested in that bond business. For goodness' sake, my dear, merry old constables," said Archie, astounded, "you surely aren't labouring under the impression that I'm the Master-Mind they were talking about in the paper? Why, what an absolutely priceless notion! I mean to say, I ask you, what! Frankly, laddies, do I look like a Master-Mind?"

Officer Cassidy heaved a deep sigh, which rumbled up from his interior like the first muttering of a cyclone.

"If I'd known," he said, regretfully, "that this guy was going to turn out a ruddy Englishman, I'd have taken a slap at him with m' stick and chanced it!"

Officer Donahue considered the point well taken.

"Ah!" he said, understandingly. He regarded Archie with an unfriendly eye. "I know th' sort well! Trampling on th' face av th' poor!"

"Ya c'n trample on the poor man's face," said Officer Cassidy, severely; "but don't be surprised if one day he bites your leg!"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"But, my dear old sir," protested Archie, "I've never trampled——"

"One of these days," said Officer Donahue, moodily, "the Shannon will flow in blood to the sea!"

"Absolutely! But——"

Officer Cassidy uttered a glad cry.

"Why couldn't we hit him a lick," he suggested, brightly, "an' tell th' Cap. he resisted us in th' exercise of our jooty?"

An instant gleam of approval and enthusiasm came into Officer Donahue's eyes. Officer Donahue was not a man who got these luminous inspirations himself, but that did not prevent him appreciating them in others and bestowing commendation in the right quarter. There was nothing petty or grudging about Officer Donahue.

"Ye're the lad with the head, Tim!" he exclaimed admiringly.

"It just sorta came to me," said Mr. Cassidy, modestly.

"It's a great idea, Timmy!"

"Just happened to think of it," said Mr. Cassidy, with a coy gesture of self-effacement.

Archie had listened to the dialogue with growing uneasiness. Not for the first time since he had made their acquaintance, he became vividly aware of the exceptional physical gifts of these two men. The New York police force demands from those who would join its ranks an extremely high standard of stature and sinew, but it was obvious that jolly old Donahue and Cassidy must have passed in first shot without any difficulty whatever.

"I say, you know," he observed, apprehensively.

And then a sharp and commanding voice spoke from the outer room.

"Donahue! Cassidy! What the devil does this mean?"

Archie had a momentary impression that an angel had fluttered down to his rescue. If this was the case, the angel had assumed an effective disguise—that of a police captain. The new arrival was a far smaller man than his subordinates—so much smaller that it did Archie good to look at him. For a long time he had been wishing that it were possible to rest his eyes with the spectacle of something of a slightly less out-size nature than his two companions.

"Why have you left your posts?"

The effect of the interruption on the Messrs. Cassidy and Donahue was pleasingly instantaneous. They seemed to shrink to

almost normal proportions, and their manner took on an attractive deference.

Officer Donahue saluted.

"If ye plaze, sorr——"

Officer Cassidy also saluted, simultaneously.

"'Twas like this, sorr——"

The captain froze Officer Cassidy with a glance and, leaving him congealed, turned to Officer Donahue.

"Oi wuz standing on th' fire-escape, sorr," said Officer Donahue, in a tone of obsequious respect which not only delighted, but astounded Archie, who hadn't known he could talk like that, "accordin' to instructions, when I heard a suspicious noise. I crope in, sorr, and found this duck—found the accused, sorr—in front of th' mirror, examinin' himself. I then called to Officer Cassidy for assistance. We pinched—arrested um, sorr."

The captain looked at Archie. It seemed to Archie that he looked at him coldly and with contempt.

"Who is he?"

"The Master-Mind, sorr."

"The what?"

"The accused, sorr. The man that's wanted."

"You may want him. I don't," said the captain. Archie, though relieved, thought he might have put it more nicely. "This isn't Moon. It's not a bit like him."

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie, cordially. "It's all a mistake, old companion, as I was trying to——"

"Cut it out!"

"Oh, right-o!"

"You've seen the photographs at the station. Do you mean to tell me you see any resemblance?"

"If ye plaze, sorr," said Officer Cassidy, coming to life.

"Well?"

"We thought he'd bin disguising himself, the way he wouldn't be recognised."

"You're a fool!" said the captain.

"Yes, sorr," said Officer Cassidy, meekly.

"So are you, Donahue."

"Yes, sorr."

Archie's respect for this chappie was going up all the time. He seemed to be able to take years off the lives of these massive blighters with a word. It was like the stories you read about lion-

tamers. Archie did not despair of seeing Officer Donahue and his old college chum Cassidy eventually jumping through hoops.

"Who are you?" demanded the captain, turning to Archie.

"Well, my name is——"

"What are you doing here?"

"Well, it's rather a longish story, you know. Don't want to bore you, and all that."

"I'm here to listen. You can't bore *me*."

"Dashed nice of you to put it like that," said Archie, gratefully.

"I mean to say, makes it easier and so forth. What I mean is, you know how rotten you feel telling the deuce of a long yarn and wondering if the party of the second part is wishing you would turn off the tap and go home. I mean——"

"If," said the captain, "you're reciting something, stop. If you're trying to tell me what you're doing here, make it shorter and easier."

Archie saw his point. Of course, time was money—the modern spirit of hustle—all that sort of thing.

"Well, it was this bathing suit, you know" he said.

"What bathing suit?"

"Mine, don't you know. A lemon-coloured contrivance. Rather bright and so forth, but in its proper place not altogether a bad egg. Well, the whole thing started, you know, with my standing on a bally pedestal sort of arrangement in a diving attitude—for the cover, you know. I don't know if you have ever done anything of that kind yourself, but it gives you a most fearful crick in the spine. However, that's rather beside the point, I suppose—don't know why I mentioned it. Well, this morning he was dashed late, so I went out——"

"What the devil are you talking about?"

Archie looked at him, surprised.

"Aren't I making it clear?"

"No."

"Well, you understand about the bathing suit, don't you? The jolly old bathing suit, you've grasped that, what?"

"No."

"Oh, I say," said Archie. "That's rather a nuisance. I mean to say, the bathing suit's what you might call the good old pivot of the whole dashed affair you see. Well, you understand about the cover, what? You're pretty clear on the subject of the cover?"

"What cover?"

"Why, for the magazine."

"What magazine?"

"Now there you rather have me. One of these bright little periodicals, you know, that you see popping to and fro on the bookstalls."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the captain. He looked at Archie with an expression of distrust and hostility. "And I'll tell you straight out I don't like the looks of you. I believe you're a pal of his."

"No longer," said Archie, firmly. "I mean to say, a chappie who makes you stand on a bally pedestal sort of arrangement and get a crick in the spine, and then doesn't turn up and leaves you biffing all over the countryside in a bathing suit——"

The reintroduction of the bathing suit motive seemed to have the worst effect on the captain. He flushed darkly.

"Are you trying to josh me? I've a mind to soak you!"

"If ye plaze, sorr," cried Officer Donahue and Officer Cassidy in chorus. In the course of their professional career they did not often hear their superior make any suggestions with which they saw eye to eye, but he had certainly, in their opinion, spoken a mouthful now.

"No, honestly, my dear old thing, nothing was farther from my thoughts——"

He would have spoken further, but at this moment the world came to an end. At least, that was how it sounded. Somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood something went off with a vast explosion, shattering the glass in the window, peeling the plaster from the ceiling, and sending him staggering into the inhospitable arms of Officer Donahue.

The three guardians of the Law stared at one another.

"If ye plaze, sorr," said Officer Cassidy saluting.

"Well?"

"May I spake, sorr?"

"Well?"

"Something's exploded, sorr!"

The information, kindly meant though it was, seemed to annoy the captain.

"What the devil did you think I thought had happened?" he demanded, with not a little irritation. "It was a bomb!"

Archie could have corrected this diagnosis, for already a faint but appealing aroma of an alcoholic nature was creeping into the

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

room through a hole in the ceiling, and there had risen before his eyes the picture of J. B. Wheeler affectionately regarding that barrel of his on the previous morning in the studio upstairs. J. B. Wheeler had wanted quick results, and he had got them. Archie had long since ceased to regard J. B. Wheeler as anything but a tumour on the social system, but he was bound to admit that he had certainly done him a good turn now. Already these honest men, diverted by the superior attraction of this latest happening, appeared to have forgotten his existence.

"Sorr!" said Officer Donahue.

"Well?"

"It came from upstairs, sorr."

"Of course it came from upstairs. Cassidy!"

"Sorr?"

"Get down into the street, call up the reserves, and stand at the front entrance to keep the crowd back. We'll have the whole city here in five minutes."

"Right, sorr."

"Don't let anyone in."

"No, sorr."

"Well, see that you don't. Come along, Donahue, now. Look sloppy."

"On the spot, sorr!" said Officer Donahue.

A moment later Archie had the studio to himself. Two minutes later he was picking his way cautiously down the fire-escape after the manner of the recent Mr. Moon. Archie had not seen much of Mr. Moon, but he had seen enough to know that in certain crises his methods were sound and should be followed. Elmer Moon was not a good man; his ethics were poor and his moral code shaky; but in the matter of legging it away from a situation of peril and discomfort he had no superior.

CHAPTER VII

MR ROSCOE SHERRIFF HAS AN IDEA

ARCHIE inserted a fresh cigarette in his long holder and began to smoke a little moodily. It was about a week after his disturbing adventures in J. B. Wheeler's studio, and life had ceased for the moment to be a thing of careless enjoyment. Mr. Wheeler, mourning over his lost homebrew and refusing, like Niobe, to be comforted, had suspended the sittings for the magazine cover, thus robbing Archie of his life-work. Mr. Brewster had not been in genial mood of late. And, in addition to all this, Lucille was away on a visit to a school-friend. And when Lucille went away, she took with her the sunshine. Archie was not surprised at her being popular and in demand among her friends, but that did not help him to become reconciled to her absence.

He gazed rather wistfully across the table at his friend, Roscoe Sherriff, the Press-agent, another of his Pen-and-Ink Club acquaintances. They had just finished lunch, and during the meal Sherriff, who like most men of action, was fond of hearing the sound of his own voice and liked exercising it on the subject of himself, had been telling Archie a few anecdotes about his professional past. From these the latter had conceived a picture of Roscoe Sherriff's life as a prismatic thing of energy and adventure and well-paid withal—just the sort of life, in fact, which he would have enjoyed leading himself. He wished that he, too, like the Press-agent, could go about the place "slipping things over" and "putting things across." Daniel Brewster, he felt, would have beamed upon a son-in-law like Roscoe Sherriff.

"The more I see of America," sighed Archie, "the more it amazes me. All you birds seem to have been doing things from the cradle upwards. I wish I could do things!"

"Well, why don't you?"

Archie flicked the ash from his cigarette into the finger-bowl.

"Oh, I don't know, you know," he said. "Somehow, none of our family ever have. I don't know why it is, but whenever a Moffam starts out to do things he infallibly makes a bloomer. There was a Moffam in the Middle Ages who had a sudden spasm of energy and

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

set out to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, dressed as a wandering friar. Rum ideas they had in those days."

"Did he get there?"

"Absolutely not! Just as he was leaving the front door his favourite hound mistook him for a tramp—or a varlet, or a scurvy knave, or whatever they used to call them at that time—and bit him in the fleshy part of the leg."

"Well, at least he started."

"Enough to make a chappie start, what?"

Roscoe Sherriff sipped his coffee thoughtfully. He was an apostle of Energy, and it seemed to him that he could make a convert of Archie and incidentally do himself a bit of good. For several days he had been looking for someone like Archie to help him in a small matter which he had in mind.

"If you're really keen on doings things," he said, "there's something you can do for me right away."

Archie beamed. Action was what his soul demanded.

"Anything, dear boy, anything! State your case!"

"Would you have any objection to putting up a snake for me?"

"Putting up a snake?"

"Just for a day or two."

"But how do you mean, old soul? Put him up where?"

"Wherever you live. Where do you live? The Cosmopolis, isn't it? Of course! You married old Brewster's daughter. I remember reading about it."

"But, I say, laddie, I don't want to spoil your day and disappoint you and so forth, but my jolly old father-in-law would never let me keep a snake. Why, it's as much as I can do to make him let me stop on in the place."

"He wouldn't know."

"There's not much that goes on in the hotel that he doesn't know," said Archie, doubtfully.

"He mustn't know. The whole point of the thing is that it must be a dead secret."

Archie flicked some more ash into the finger-bowl.

"I don't seem absolutely to have grasped the affair in all its aspects, if you know what I mean," he said. "I mean to say—in the first place—why would it brighten your young existence if I entertained this snake of yours?"

"It's not mine. It belongs to Mme. Brudowska. You've heard of her, of course?"

"Oh yes. She's some sort of performing snake female in vaudeville or something, isn't she, or something of that species or order?"

"You're near it, but not quite right. She is the leading exponent of high-brow tragedy on any stage in the civilized world."

"Absolutely! I remember now. My wife lugged me to see her perform one night. It all comes back to me. She had me wedged in an orchestra-stall before I knew what I was up against, and then it was too late. I remember reading in some journal or other that she had a pet snake, given her by some Russian prince or other, what?"

"That," said Sherriff, "was the impression I intended to convey when I sent the story to the papers. I'm her Press-agent. As a matter of fact, I bought Peter—its name's Peter—myself down on the East Side. I always believe in animals for Press-agent stunts. I've nearly always had good results. But with Her Nibs I'm handicapped. Shackled, so to speak. You might almost say my genius is stifled. Or strangled, if you prefer it."

"Anything you say," agreed Archie, courteously. "But how? Why is your what-d'you-call-it what's-its-named?"

"She keeps me on a leash. She won't let me do anything with a kick in it. If I've suggested one rip-snorting stunt, I've suggested twenty, and every time she turns them down on the ground that that sort of thing is beneath the dignity of an artist in her position. It doesn't give a fellow a chance. So now I've made up my mind to do her good by stealth. I'm going to steal her snake."

"Steal it? Pinch it, as it were?"

"Yes. Big story for the papers, you see. She's grown very much attached to Peter. He's her mascot. I believe she's practically kidded herself into believing that Russian prince story. If I can sneak it away and keep it away for a day or two, she'll do the rest. She'll make such a fuss that the papers will be full of it."

"I see."

"Now, any ordinary woman would work in with me. But not Her Nibs. She would call it cheap and degrading and a lot of other things. It's got to be a genuine steal, and, if I'm caught at it, I lose my job. So that's where you come in."

"But where am I to keep the jolly old reptile?"

"Oh, anywhere. Punch a few holes in a hat-box, and make it up a shake-down inside. It'll be company for you."

"Something in that. My wife's away just now and it's a bit lonely in the evenings."

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"You'll never be lonely with Peter around. He's a great scout. Always merry and bright."

"He doesn't bite, I suppose, or sting or what-not?"

"He may what-not occasionally. It depends on the weather. But, outside of that, he's as harmless as a canary."

"Dashed dangerous things, canaries," said Archie, thoughtfully. "They peck at you."

"Don't weaken!" pleaded the Press-agent.

"Oh, all right. I'll take him. By the way, touching the matter of browsing and sluicing. What do I feed him on?"

"Oh, anything. Bread-and-milk or fruit or soft-boiled egg or dog-biscuit or ants'-eggs. You know—anything you have yourself. Well, I'm much obliged for your hospitality. I'll do the same for you another time. Now I must be getting along to see to the practical end of the thing. By the way, Her Nibs lives at the Cosmopolis, too. Very convenient. Well, so long. See you later."

Archie, left alone, began for the first time to have serious doubts. He had allowed himself to be swayed by Mr. Sherriff's magnetic personality, but now that the other had removed himself he began to wonder if he had been entirely wise to lend his sympathy and co-operation to the scheme. He had never had intimate dealings with a snake before, but he had kept silkworms as a child, and there had been the deuce of a lot of fuss and unpleasantness over them. Getting into the salad and what-not. Something seemed to tell him that he was asking for trouble with a loud voice, but he had given his word and he supposed he would have to go through with it.

He lit another cigarette and wandered out into Fifth Avenue. His usually smooth brow was ruffled with care. Despite the eulogies which Sherriff had uttered concerning Peter, he found his doubts increasing. Peter might, as the Press-agent had stated, be a great scout, but was his little Garden of Eden on the fifth floor of the Cosmopolis Hotel likely to be improved by the advent of even the most amiable and winsome of serpents? However——

"Moffam! My dear fellow!"

The voice, speaking suddenly in his ear from behind, roused Archie from his reflections. Indeed, it roused him so effectually that he jumped a clear inch off the ground and bit his tongue. Revolving on his axis, he found himself confronting a middle-aged man with a face like a horse. The man was dressed in something of

of an old-world style. His clothes had an English cut. He had a drooping grey moustache. He also wore a grey bowler hat flattened at the crown—but who are we to judge him?

“Archie Moffam! I have been trying to find you all the morning.”

Archie had placed him now. He had not seen General Mannister for several years—not, indeed, since the days when he used to meet him at the home of young Lord Seacliff, his nephew. Archie had been at Eton and Oxford with Seacliff, and had often visited him in the Long Vacation.

“Halloa, General! What ho, what ho! What on earth are you doing over here?”

“Let’s get out of this crush, my boy.” General Mannister steered Archie into a sidestreet. “That’s better.” He cleared his throat once or twice, as if embarrassed. “I’ve brought Seacliff over,” he said, finally.

“Dear old Squiffy here? Oh, I say! Great work!”

General Mannister did not seem to share his enthusiasm. He looked like a horse with a secret sorrow. He coughed three times, like a horse who, in addition to a secret sorrow, had contracted asthma.

“You will find Seacliff changed,” he said. “Let me see, how long is it since you and he met?”

Archie reflected.

“I was demobbed just about a year ago. I saw him in Paris about a year before that. The old egg got a bit of shrapnel in his foot or something, didn’t he? Anyhow, I remember he was sent home.”

“His foot is perfectly well again now. But, unfortunately, the enforced inaction led to disastrous results. You recollect, no doubt, that Seacliff always had a—a tendency—a—a weakness—it was a family failing——”

“Mopping it up, do you mean? Shifting it? Looking on the jolly old stuff when it was red and what-not, what?”

“Exactly.”

Archie nodded.

“Dear old Squiffy was always rather a lad for the wassail-bowl. When I met him in Paris, I remember, he was quite tolerably blotto.”

“Precisely. And the failing has, I regret to say, grown on him since he returned from the war. My poor sister was extremely worried. In fact, to cut a long story short, I induced him to

accompany me to America. I am attached to the British Legation in Washington now, you know."

"Oh, really?"

"I wished Seacliff to come with me to Washington, but he insists on remaining in New York. He stated specifically that the thought of living in Washington gave him the—what was the expression he used?"

"The pip?"

"The pip. Precisely."

"But what was the idea of bringing him to America?"

"This admirable Prohibition enactment has rendered America—to my mind—the ideal place for a young man of his views." The General looked at his watch. "It is most fortunate that I happened to run into you, my dear fellow. My train for Washington leaves in another hour, and I have packing to do. I want to leave poor Seacliff in your charge while I am gone."

"Oh, I say! What!"

"You can look after him. I am credibly informed that even now there are places in New York where a determined young man may obtain the—er—stuff, and I should be infinitely obliged—and my poor sister would be infinitely grateful—if you would keep an eye on him." He hailed a taxi-cab. "I am sending Seacliff round to the Cosmopolis to-night. I am sure you will do everything you can. Good-bye, my boy, good-bye."

Archie continued his walk. This, he felt, was beginning to be a bit thick. He smiled a bitter, mirthless smile as he recalled the fact that less than half an hour had elapsed since he had expressed a regret that he did not belong to the ranks of those who do things. Fate since then had certainly supplied him with jobs with a lavish hand. By bed-time he would be an active accomplice to a theft, valet and companion to a snake he had never met, and—as far as he could gather the scope of his duties—a combination of nursemaid and private detective to dear old Squiffy.

It was past four o'clock when he returned to the Cosmopolis. Roscoe Sherriff was pacing the lobby of the hotel nervously, carrying a small hand-bag.

"Here you are at last! Good heavens, man, I've been waiting two hours."

"Sorry, old bean. I was musing a bit and lost track of the time."

The Press-agent looked cautiously round. There was nobody within earshot.

"Here he is!" he said.

"Who?"

"Peter."

"Where?" said Archie, staring blankly.

"In this bag. Did you expect to find him strolling arm-in-arm with me round the lobby? Here you are! Take him!"

He was gone. And Archie, holding the bag, made his way to the lift. The bag squirmed gently in his grip.

The only other occupant of the lift was a striking-looking woman of foreign appearance, dressed in a way that made Archie feel that she must be somebody or she couldn't look like that. Her face, too, seemed vaguely familiar. She entered the lift at the second floor where the tea-room is and she had the contented, expression of one who had tea'd to her satisfaction. She got off at the same floor as Archie, and walked swiftly, in a lithe, pantherish way, round the bend in the corridor. Archie followed more slowly. When he reached the door of his room, the passage was empty. He inserted the key in his door, turned it, pushed the door open, and pocketed the key. He was about to enter when the bag again squirmed gently in his grip.

From the days of Pandora, through the epoch of Bluebeard's wife, down to the present time, one of the chief failings of humanity has been the disposition to open things that were better closed. It would have been simple for Archie to have taken another step and put a door between himself and the world, but there came to him the irresistible desire to peep into the bag now—not three seconds later, but now. All the way up in the lift he had been battling with the temptation, and now he succumbed.

The bag was one of those simple bags with a thingummy which you press. Archie pressed it. And, as it opened, out popped the head of Peter. His eyes met Archie's. Over his head there seemed to be an invisible mark of interrogation. His gaze was curious, but kindly. He appeared to be saying to himself, "Have I found a friend?"

Serpents, or Snakes, says the Encyclopaedia, are reptiles of the saurian class Ophidia, characterised by an elongated, cylindrical, limbless, scaly form, and distinguished from lizards by the fact that the halves (*rami*) of the lower jaw are not solidly united at the chin, but movably connected by an elastic ligament. The vertebrae are very numerous, gastrocentrous, and procoelous. And, of course, when they put it like that, you can see at once that a man

might spend hours with combined entertainment and profit just looking at a snake.

Archie would no doubt have done this; but long before he had time really to inspect the halves (*rami*) of his new friend's lower jaw and to admire its elastic fittings, and long before the gastro-centrous and procoelous character of the other's vertebrae had made any real impression on him, a piercing scream almost at his elbow startled him out of his scientific reverie. A door opposite had opened, and the woman of the elevator was standing staring at him with an expression of horror and fury that went through him like a knife. It was the expression which, more than anything else, had made Mme. Brudowska what she was professionally. Combined with a deep voice and a sinuous walk, it enabled her to draw down a matter of a thousand dollars per week.

Indeed, though the fact gave him little pleasure Archie, as a matter of fact, was at this moment getting about—including war-tax—two dollars and seventy-five cents worth of the great emotional star for nothing. For, having treated him gratis to the look of horror and fury, she now moved towards him with the sinuous walk and spoke in the tone which she seldom permitted herself to use before the curtain of act two, unless there was a whale of a situation that called for it in act one.

"Thief!"

It was the way she said it.

Archie staggered backwards as though he had been hit between the eyes, fell through the open door of his room, kicked it to with a flying foot, and collapsed on the bed. Peter, the snake, who had fallen on the floor with a squashy sound, looked suprised and pained for a moment; then, being a philosopher at heart, cheered up and began hunting for flies under the bureau.

CHAPTER VIII

A DISTURBED NIGHT FOR DEAR OLD SQUIFFY

PERIL sharpens the intellect. Archie's mind as a rule worked in rather a languid and restful sort of way, but now it got going with a rush and a whirl. He glared round the room. He had never seen a room so devoid of satisfactory cover. And then there came to him a scheme, a ruse. It offered a chance of escape. It was, indeed, a bit of all right.

Peter, the snake, loafing contentedly about the carpet, found himself seized by what the Encyclopaedia calls the "distensible gullet" and looked up reproachfully. The next moment he was in his bag again; and Archie, bounding silently into the bathroom, was tearing the cord off his dressing-gown.

There came a banging at the door. A voice spoke sternly. A masculine voice this time.

"Say! Open this door!"

Archie rapidly attached the dressing-gown cord to the handle of the bag, leaped to the window, opened it, tied the cord to a projecting piece of iron on the sill, lowered Peter and the bag into the depths, and closed the window again. The whole affair took but a few seconds. Generals have received the thanks of their nations for displaying less resource on the field of battle.

He opened the door. Outside stood the bereaved woman, and beside her a bullet-headed gentleman with a bowler hat on the back of his head, in whom Archie recognised the hotel detective.

The hotel detective also recognised Archie, and the stern cast of his features relaxed. He even smiled a rusty but propitiatory smile. He imagined—erroneously—that Archie, being the son-in-law of the owner of the hotel, had a pull with that gentleman; and he resolved to proceed warily lest he jeopardise his job.

"Why, Mr. Moffam!" he said, apologetically. "I didn't know it was you I was disturbing."

"Always glad to have a chat," said Archie, cordially. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"My snake!" cried the queen of tragedy. "Where is my snake?"

Archie looked at the detective. The detective looked at Archie.

"This lady," said the detective, with a dry little cough, "thinks her snake is in your room, Mr. Moffam."

"Snake?"

"Snake's what the lady said."

"My snake! My Peter!" Mme. Brudowska's voice shook with emotion. "He is here—here in this room."

Archie shook his head.

"No snakes here! Absolutely not! I remember noticing when I came in."

"The snake is here—here in this room. This man had it in a bag! I saw him! He is a thief!"

"Easy, ma'am!" protested the detective. "Go easy! This gentleman is the boss's son-in-law."

"I care not who he is! He has my snake! Here—here in this room!"

"Mr. Moffam wouldn't go round stealing snakes."

"Rather not," said Archie. "Never stole a snake in my life. None of the Moffams have ever gone about stealing snakes. Regular family tradition! Though I once had an uncle who kept gold-fish."

"He is here! Here! My Peter!"

Archie looked at the detective. The detective looked at Archie. "We must humour her!" their glances said.

"Of course," said Archie, "if you'd like to search the room, what? What I mean to say is, this is Liberty Hall. Everybody welcome! Bring the kiddies!"

"I will search the room!" said Mme. Brudowska.

The detective glanced apologetically at Archie.

"Don't blame me for this, Mr. Moffam," he urged.

"Rather not! Only too glad you've dropped in!"

He took up an easy attitude against the window, and watched the empress of the emotional drama explore. Presently she desisted, baffled. For an instant she paused, as though about to speak, then swept from the room. A moment later a door banged across the passage.

"How do they get that way?" queried the detective. "Well, g'bye, Mr. Moffam. Sorry to have butted in."

The door closed. Archie waited a few moments, then went to the window and hauled in the slack. Presently the bag appeared over the edge of the window-sill.

"Good God!" said Archie.

In the rush and swirl of recent events he must have omitted to see that the clasp that fastened the bag was properly closed; for the bag, as it jumped on to the window-sill, gaped at him like a yawning face. And inside it there was nothing.

Archie leaned as far out of the window as he could manage without committing suicide. Far below him, the traffic took its usual course and the pedestrians moved to and fro upon the pavements. There was no crowding, no excitement. Yet only a few moments before a long green snake with three hundred ribs, a distensible gullet, and gastrocentrous vertebrae must have descended on that street like the gentle rain from Heaven upon the place beneath. And nobody seemed even interested. Not for the first time since he had arrived in America, Archie marvelled at the cynical detachment of the New Yorker, who permits himself to be surprised at nothing.

He shut the window and moved away with a heavy heart. He had not had the pleasure of an extended acquaintanceship with Peter, but he had seen enough of him to realise his sterling qualities. Somewhere beneath Peter's three hundred ribs there had lain a heart of gold, and Archie mourned for his loss.

Archie had a dinner and theatre engagement that night, and it was late when he returned to the hotel. He found his father-in-law prowling restlessly about the lobby. There seemed to be something on Mr. Brewster's mind. He came up to Archie with a brooding frown on his square face.

"Who's this man Seacliff?" he demanded, without preamble. "I hear he's a friend of yours."

"Oh, you've met him, what?" said Archie. "Had a nice little chat together, yes? Talked of this and that, no?"

"We have not said a word to each other."

"Really? Oh, well, dear old Squiffy is one of those strong, silent fellers, you know. You mustn't mind if he's a bit dumb. He never says much, but it's whispered round the clubs that he thinks a lot. It was rumoured in the spring of nineteen-thirteen that Squiffy was on the point of making a bright remark, but it never came to anything."

Mr. Brewster struggled with his feelings.

"Who is he? You seem to know him."

"Oh yes. Great pal of mine, Squiffy. We went through Eton, Oxford, and the Bankruptcy Court together. And here's a rummy

coincidence. When they examined *me*, I had no assets. And, when they examined Squiffy, *he* had no assets! Rather extraordinary, what?"

Mr. Brewster seemed to be in no mood for discussing coincidences.

"I might have known he was a friend of yours!" he said, bitterly. "Well, if you want to see him, you'll have to do it outside my hotel."

"Why, I thought he was stopping here."

"He is—to-night. To-morrow he can look for some other hotel to break up."

"Great Scot! Has dear old Squiffy been breaking the place up?"

Mr. Brewster snorted.

"I am informed that this precious friend of yours entered my grill-room at eight o'clock. He must have been completely intoxicated, though the head waiter tells me he noticed nothing at the time."

Archie nodded approvingly.

"Dear old Squiffy was always like that. It's a gift. However woozled he might me, it was impossible to detect it with the naked eye. I've seen the dear old chap many a time whiffled to the eyebrows, and looking as sober as a bishop. Soberer! When did it begin to dawn on the lads in the grill-room that the old egg had been pushing the boat out?"

"The head waiter," said Mr. Brewster, with cold fury, "tells me that he got a hint of the man's condition when he suddenly got up from his table and went the round of the room, pulling off all the table-cloths and breaking everything that was on them. He then threw a number of rolls at the diners, and left. He seems to have gone straight to bed."

"Dashed sensible of him, what? Sound, practical chap, Squiffy. But where on earth did he get the—er—materials?"

"From his room. I made enquiries. He has six large cases in his room."

"Squiffy always was a chap of infinite resource! Well, I'm dashed sorry this should have happened, don't you know?"

"If it hadn't been for you, the man would never have come here." Mr. Brewster brooded coldly. "I don't know why it is, but ever since you came to this hotel I've had nothing but trouble."

"Dashed sorry!" said Archie, sympathetically.

"Grrh!" said Mr. Brewster.

Archie made his way meditatively to the lift. The injustice of his father-in-law's attitude pained him. It was absolutely rotten and all that to be blamed for everything that went wrong in the Hotel Cosmopolis.

While this conversation was in progress, Lord Seacliff was enjoying a refreshing sleep in his room on the fourth floor. Two hours passed. The noise of the traffic in the street below faded away. Only the rattle of an occasional belated cab broke the silence. In the hotel all was still. Mr. Brewster had gone to bed. Archie, in his room, smoked meditatively. Peace may have been said to reign.

At half-past two Lord Seacliff awoke. His hours of slumber were always irregular. He sat up in bed and switched the light on. He was a shock-headed young man with a red face and a hot brown eye. He yawned and stretched himself. His head was aching a little. The room seemed to him a trifle close. He got out of bed and threw open the window. Then, returning to bed, he picked up a book and began to read. He was conscious of feeling a little jumpy, and reading generally sent him to sleep.

Much has been written on the subject of bed-books. The general consensus of opinion is that a gentle, slow-moving story makes the best opiate. If this be so, dear old Squiffy's choice of literature had been rather injudicious. His book was *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and the particular story which he selected for persural was the one entitled, "The Speckled Band." He was not a great reader, but, when he read, he liked something with a bit of zip to it.

Squiffy became absorbed. He had read the story before, but a long time back, and its complications were fresh to him. The tale, it may be remembered, deals with the activities of an ingenious gentleman who kept a snake, and used to loose it into people's bedrooms as a preliminary to collecting on their insurance. It gave Squiffy pleasant thrills, for he had always had a particular horror of snakes. As a child, he had shrunk from visiting the serpent house at the Zoo; and later, when he had come to man's estate and had put off childish things, and settled down in real earnest to his self-appointed mission of drinking up all the alcoholic fluid in England, the distaste for Ophidia had lingered. To a dislike for real snakes had been added a maturer shrinking from those which existed only in his imagination. He could still

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

recall his emotions on the occasion, scarcely three months before, when he had seen a long, green serpent which a majority of his contemporaries had assured him wasn't there.

Squiffy read on:—

"Suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continuously from a kettle."

Lord Seacliff looked up from his book with a start. Imagination was beginning to play him tricks. He could have sworn that he had actually heard that identical sound. It had seemed to come from the window. He listened again. No! All was still. He returned to his book and went on reading.

"It was a singular sight that met our eyes. Beside the table, on a wooden chair, sat Doctor Grimesby Rylott, clad in a long dressing-gown. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head.

"I took a step forward. In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat, diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent. . . ."

"Ugh!" said Squiffy.

He closed the book and put it down. His head was aching worse than ever. He wished now that he had read something else. No fellow could read himself to sleep with this sort of thing. People ought not to write this sort of thing.

His heart gave a bound. There it was again, that hissing sound. And this time he was sure it came from the window.

He looked at the window, and remained staring, frozen. Over the sill, with a graceful, leisurely movement, a green snake was crawling. As it crawled, it raised its head and peered from side to side, like a short-sighted man looking for his spectacles. It hesitated a moment on the edge of the sill, then wriggled to the floor and began to cross the room. Squiffy stared on.

It would have pained Peter deeply, for he was a snake of great sensibility, if he had known how much his entrance had disturbed the occupant of the room. He himself had no feeling but gratitude for the man who had opened the window and so enabled him to get in out of the rather nippy night air. Ever since the bag had swung open and shot him out on to the sill of the window below Archie's, he had been waiting patiently for something of the kind to happen. He was a snake who took things as they came, and was prepared to rough it a bit if necessary; but for the last hour

or two he had been hoping that somebody would do something practical in the way of getting him in out of the cold. When at home, he had an eiderdown quilt to sleep on, and the stone of the window-sill was a little trying to a snake of regular habits. He crawled thankfully across the floor under Squiffy's bed. There was a pair of trousers there, for his host had undressed when not in a frame of mind to fold his clothes neatly and place them upon a chair. Peter looked the trousers over. They were not an eiderdown quilt, but they would serve. He curled up in them and went to sleep. He had had an exciting day, and was glad to turn in.

After about ten minutes, the tension of Squiffy's attitude relaxed. His heart, which had seemed to suspend its operations, began beating again. Reason re-asserted itself. He peeped cautiously under the bed. He could see nothing.

Squiffy was convinced. He told himself that he had never really believed in Peter as a living thing. It stood to reason that there couldn't really be a snake in his room. The window looked out on emptiness. His room was several stories above the ground. There was a stern, set expression on Squiffy's face as he climbed out of bed. It was the expression of a man who is turning over a new leaf, starting a new life. He looked about the room for some implement which would carry out the deed he had to do, and finally pulled out one of the curtain-rods. Using this as a lever, he broke open the topmost of the six cases which stood in the corner. The soft wood cracked and split. Squiffy drew out a straw-covered bottle. For a moment he stood looking at it, as a man might gaze at a friend on the point of death. Then, with a sudden determination, he went into the bathroom. There was a crash of glass and a gurgling sound.

Half an hour later the telephone in Archie's room rang.

"I say, Archie, old top," said the voice of Squiffy.

"Halloa, old bean! Is that you?"

"I say, could you pop down here for a second? I'm rather upset."

"Absolutely! Which room?"

"Four-forty-one."

"I'll be with you eftsoons or right speedily."

"Thanks, old man."

"What appears to be the difficulty?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I thought I saw a snake!"

"A snake!"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"I'll tell you all about it when you come down."

Archie found Lord Seacliff seated on his bed. An arresting aroma of mixed drinks pervaded the atmosphere.

"I say! What?" said Archie, inhaling.

"That's all right. I've been pouring my stock away. Just finished the last bottle."

"But why?"

"I told you. I thought I saw a snake!"

"Green?"

Squiffy shivered slightly.

"Frightfully green!"

Archie hesitated. He perceived that there are moments when silence is the best policy. He had been worrying himself over the unfortunate case of his friend, and now that Fate seemed to have provided a solution, it would be rash to interfere merely to ease the old bean's mind. If Squiffy was going to reform because he thought he had seen an imaginary snake, better not to let him know that the snake was a real one.

"Dashed serious!" he said.

"Bally dashed serious!" agreed Squiffy. "I'm going to cut it out!"

"Great scheme!"

"You don't think," asked Squiffy, with a touch of hopefulness, "that it could have been a real snake?"

"Never heard of the management supplying them."

"I thought it went under the bed."

"Well, take a look."

Squiffy shuddered.

"Not me! I say, old top, you know, I simply can't sleep in this room now. I was wondering if you could give me a doss somewhere in yours."

"Rather! I'm in five-forty-one. Just above. Trot along up. Here's the key. I'll tidy up a bit here, and join you in a minute."

Squiffy put on a dressing-gown and disappeared. Archie looked under the bed. From the trousers the head of Peter popped up with its usual expression of amiable enquiry. Archie nodded pleasantly, and sat down on the bed. The problem of his little friend's immediate future wanted thinking over.

He lit a cigarette and remained for a while in thought. Then he rose. An admirable solution had presented itself. He picked Peter

up and placed him in the pocket of his dressing-gown. Then, leaving the room, he mounted the stairs till he reached the seventh floor. Outside a room half-way down the corridor he paused.

From within, through the open transom, came the rhythmical snoring of a good man taking his rest after the labours of the day. Mr. Brewster was always a heavy sleeper.

"There's always a way," thought Archie, philosophically, "if a chappie only thinks of it."

His father-in-law's snoring took on a deeper note. Archie extracted Peter from his pocket and dropped him gently through the transom.

CHAPTER IX

A LETTER FROM PARKER

As the days went by and he settled down at the Hotel Cosmopolis, Archie, looking about him and revising earlier judgments, was inclined to think that of all his immediate circle he most admired Parker, the lean, grave valet of Mr. Daniel Brewster. Here was a man who, living in the closest contact with one of the most difficult persons in New York, contrived all the while to maintain an unbowed head, and, as far as one could gather from appearances, a tolerably cheerful disposition. A great man, judge him by what standard you pleased. Anxious as he was to earn an honest living, Archie would not have changed places with Parker for the salary of a movie-star.

It was Parker who first directed Archie's attention to the hidden merits of Pongo. Archie had drifted into his father-in-law's suite one morning, as he sometimes did in the effort to establish more amicable relations, and had found it occupied only by the valet, who was dusting the furniture and bric-à-brac with a feather broom rather in the style of a man-servant at the rise of the curtain of an old-fashioned farce. After a courteous exchange of greetings, Archie sat down and lit a cigarette. Parker went on dusting.

"The guv'nor," said Parker, breaking the silence, "has some nice little objay dar, sir."

"Little what?"

"Objay dar, sir."

Light dawned upon Archie.

"Of course, yes. French for junk. I see what you mean now. Dare say you're right, old friend. Don't know much about these things myself."

Parker gave an appreciative flick at a vase on the mantelpiece.

"Very valuable, some of the guv'nor's things." He had picked up the small china figure of the warrior with a spear, and was grooming it with the ostentatious care of one brushing flies off a sleeping Venus. He regarded this figure with a look of affectionate esteem which seemed to Archie absolutely uncalled-for. Archie's taste in Art was not precious. To his untutored eye the thing was

only one degree less foul than his father-in-law's Japanese prints, which he had always observed with silent loathing. "This one, now," continued Parker. "Worth a lot of money. Oh, a lot of money."

"What, Pongo?" said Archie incredulously.

"Sir?"

"I always call that rummy-looking what-not Pongo. Don't know what else you could call him, what!"

The valet seemed to disapprove of this levity. He shook his head and replaced the figure on the mantelpiece.

"Worth a lot of money," he repeated. "Not by itself, no."

"Oh, not by itself?"

"No, sir. Things like this come in pairs. Somewhere or other there's the companion-piece to this here, and if the gov'nor could get hold of it, he'd have something worth having. Something that connoozers would give a lot of money for. But one's no good without the other. You have to have both, if you understand my meaning, sir."

"I see. Like filling a straight flush, what?"

"Precisely, sir."

Archie gazed at Pongo again, with the dim hope of discovering virtues not immediately apparent to the casual observer. But without success. Pongo left him cold—even chilly. He would not have taken Pongo as a gift, to oblige a dying friend.

"How much would the pair be worth?" he asked "Ten dollars?"

Parker smiled a gravely superior smile. "A leetle more than that, sir. Several thousand dollars, more like it."

"Do you mean to say," said Archie, with honest amazement, "that there are chumps going about loose—absolutely loose—who would pay that for a weird little object like Pongo?"

"Undoubtedly, sir. These antique china figures are in great demand among collectors."

Archie looked at Pongo once more, and shook his head.

"Well, well, well! It takes all sorts to make a world, what!"

What might be called the revival of Pongo, the restoration of Pongo to the ranks of the things that matter, took place several weeks later, when Archie was making holiday at the house which his father-in-law had taken for the summer at Brookport. The curtain of the second act may be said to rise on Archie strolling back from the golf-links in the cool of an August evening. From

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

time to time he sang slightly, and wondered idly if Lucille would put the finishing touch upon the all-rightness of everything by coming to meet him and sharing his homeward walk.

She came in view at this moment, a trim little figure in a white skirt and a pale blue sweater. She waved to Archie; and Archie, as always at the sight of her, was conscious of that jumpy, fluttering sensation about the heart, which translated into words, would have formed the question, "What on earth could have made a girl like that fall in love with a chump like me?" It was a question he was continually asking himself, and one which was perpetually in the mind also of Mr. Brewster, his father-in-law. The matter of Archie's unworthiness to be the husband of Lucille was practically the only one on which the two men saw eye to eye.

"Hallo-allo-allo!" said Archie. "Here we are, what! I was just hoping you would drift over the horizon."

Lucille kissed him.

"You're a darling," she said. "And you look like a Greek god in that suit."

"Glad you like it." Archie squinted with some complacency down his chest. "I always say it doesn't matter what you pay for a suit, so long as it's *right*. I hope your jolly old father will feel that way when he settles up for it."

"Where is father? Why didn't he come back with you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, he didn't seem any too keen on my company. I left him in the locker-room chewing a cigar. Gave me the impression of having something on his mind."

"Oh, Archie! You didn't beat him *again*?"

Archie looked uncomfortable. He gazed out to sea with something of embarrassment.

"Well, as a matter of fact, old thing, to be absolutely frank, I, as it were, did!"

"Not badly?"

"Well, yes! I rather fancy I put it across him with some vim and not a little emphasis. To be perfectly accurate, I licked him by ten and eight."

"But you promised me you would let him beat you to-day. You know how pleased it would have made him."

"I know. But, light of my soul, have you any idea how dashed difficult it is to get beaten by your festive parent at golf?"

"Oh, well!" Lucille sighed. "It can't be helped, I suppose." She left in the pocket of her sweater. "Oh, there's a letter for you."

I've just been to fetch the mail. I don't know who it can be from. The handwriting looks like a vampire's. Kind of scrawly."

Archie inspected the envelope. It provided no solution.

"That's rummy! Who could be writing to me?"

"Open it and see."

"Dashed bright scheme! I will. Herbert Parker. Who the deuce is Herbert Parker?"

"Parker? Father's valet's name was Parker. The one he dismissed when he found he was wearing his shirts."

"Do you mean to say any reasonable chappie would willingly wear the sort of shirts your father——? I mean to say, there must have been some mistake."

"Do read the letter. I expect he wants to use your influence with father to have him taken back."

"My influence? With your *father*? Well, I'm dashed. Sanguine sort of Johnny, if he does. Well, here's what he says. Of course, I remember jolly old Parker now—great pal of mine."

DEAR SIR,—It is some time since the undersigned had the honour of conversing with you, but I am respectfully trusting that you may recall me to mind when I mention that until recently I served Mr. Brewster, your father-in-law, in the capacity of valet. Owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, I was dismissed from that position and am now temporarily out of a job. "How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isaiah xiv. 12).

"You know," said Archie, admiringly, "this bird is hot stuff! I mean to say he writes dashed well."

It is not, however, with my own affairs that I desire to trouble you, dear sir. I have little doubt that all will be well with me and that I shall not fall like a sparrow to the ground. "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalms xxxvii. 25). My object in writing to you is as follows. You may recall that I had the pleasure of meeting you one morning in Mr. Brewster's suite, when we had an interesting talk on the subject of Mr. B.'s *objets d'art*. You may recall being particularly interested in a small china figure To assist your memory, the figure to which I allude is the one which you whimsically referred to as Pongo. I informed you, if you remember, that, could the accompanying figure be secured, the pair would be extremely valuable.

I am glad to say, dear sir, that this has now transpired, and is on view at Beale's Art Galleries on West Forty-Fifth Street, where it will be sold to-morrow at auction, the sale commencing at two-thirty sharp. If Mr. Brewster cares to attend, he will, I fancy, have little trouble in securing it at a reasonable price. I confess that I had thought of refraining from apprising my late employer of this matter, but more Christian feelings

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

have prevailed. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Romans xii. 20). Nor, I must confess, am I altogether uninfluenced by the thought that my action in this matter may conceivably lead to Mr. B. consenting to forget the past and to reinstate me in my former position. However, I am confident that I can leave this to his good feeling.

I remain, respectfully yours,
HERBERT PARKER.

Lucille clapped her hands.

"How splendid! Father *will* be pleased!"

"Yes. Friend Parker has certainly found a way to make the old dad fond of him. Wish *I* could!"

"But you can, silly! He'll be delighted when you show him that letter."

"Yes, with Parker. Old Herb. Parker's is the neck he'll fall on—not mine."

Lucille reflected.

"I wish——" she began. She stopped. Her eyes lit up. "Oh, Archie, darling, I've got an idea!"

"Decant it."

"Why don't you slip up to New York to-morrow and buy the thing, and give it to father as a surprise?"

Archie patted her hand kindly. He hated to spoil her girlish day-dreams.

"Yes," he said. "But reflect, queen of my heart! I have at the moment of going to press just two dollars fifty in specie, which I took off your father this afternoon. We were playing twenty-five cents a hole. He coughed it up without enthusiasm—in fact, with a nasty hacking sound—but I've got it. But that's all I have got."

"That's all right. You can pawn that ring and that bracelet of mine."

"Oh, I say, what! Pop the family jewels?"

"Only for a day or two. Of course, once you've got the thing, father will pay us back. He would give you all the money we asked him for, if he knew what it was for. But I want to surprise him. And if you were to go to him and ask him for a thousand dollars without telling him what it was for, he might refuse."

"He might!" said Archie. "He might!"

"It all works out splendidly. To-morrow's the Invitation Handicap, and father's been looking forward to it for weeks. He'd hate to have to go up to town himself and not play in it. But you can slip up and slip back without his knowing anything about it."

comes back to town—he's away just now—I'll take you along to him and we'll beard the old boy in his den. I'll introduce you, and get that extract from Italian opera off your chest which you've just been singing to me, and you'll find it'll be all right. He isn't what you might call one of my greatest admirers, but everybody says he's a square sort of cove and he'll see you aren't snootered. And now, laddie, touching the matter of that steak."

The waiter disappeared, greatly cheered, and Archie, turning, perceived that his friend Reggie van Tuyl was entering the room. He waved to him to join his table. He liked Reggie, and it also occurred to him that a man of the world like the heir of the van Tuyls, who had been popping about New York for years, might be able to give him some much-needed information on the procedure at an auction sale, a matter on which he himself was profoundly ignorant.

CHAPTER X

DOING FATHER A BIT OF GOOD

REGGIE VAN TUYL approached the table languidly, and sank down into a chair. He was a long youth with a rather subdued and deflated look, as though the burden of the van Tuyl millions was more than his frail strength could support. Most things tired him.

"I say, Reggie, old top," said Archie, "you're just the lad I wanted to see. I require the assistance of a blighter of ripe intellect. Tell me, laddie, do you know anything about sales?"

Reggie eyed him sleepily.

"Sales?"

"Auction sales."

Reggie considered.

"Well, they're sales, you know." He checked a yawn. "Auction sales, you understand."

"Yes," said Archie encouragingly. "Something—the name or something—seemed to tell me that."

"Fellows put things up for sale, you know, and other fellows—other fellows go in and—and buy 'em, if you follow me."

"Yes, but what's the procedure? I mean, what do I do? That's what I'm after. I've got to buy something at Beale's this afternoon. How do I set about it?"

"Well," said Reggie, drowsily, "there are several ways of bidding, you know. You can shout, or you can nod, or you can twiddle your fingers——" The effort of concentration was too much for him. He leaned back limply in his chair. "I'll tell you what. I've nothing to do this afternoon. I'll come with you and show you."

When he entered the Art Galleries a few minutes later, Archie was glad of the moral support of even such a wobbly reed as Reggie van Tuyl. There is something about an auction room which weighs heavily upon the novice. The hushed interior was bathed in a dim, religious light; and the congregation, seated on small wooden chairs, gazed in reverent silence at the pulpit, where a gentleman of commanding presence and sparkling pince-nez was

delivering a species of chant. Behind a gold curtain at the end of the room mysterious forms flitted to and fro. Archie, who had been expecting something on the lines of the New York Stock Exchange, which he had once been privileged to visit when it was in a more than usually feverish mood, found the atmosphere oppressively ecclesiastical. He sat down and looked about him. The presiding priest went on with his chant.

"Sixteen-sixteen-sixteen-sixteen-sixteen—worth three hundred—sixteen-sixteen-sixteen-sixteen-sixteen—ought to bring five hundred—sixteen - sixteen - seventeen - seventeen - eighteen - eighteen-nineteen-nineteen-nineteen." He stopped and eyed the worshippers with a glittering and reproachful eye. They had, it seemed, disappointed him. His lips curled, and he waved a hand towards a grimly uncomfortable-looking chair with insecure legs and a good deal of gold paint about it. "Gentlemen! Ladies and gentlemen! You are not here to waste my time; I am not here to waste yours. Am I seriously offered nineteen dollars for this eighteenth-century chair, acknowledged to be the finest piece sold in New York for months and months? Am I—twenty? I thank you. Twenty-twenty-twenty-twenty. *Your* opportunity! Priceless. Very few extant. Twenty-five-five-five-five-thirty-thirty. Just what you are looking for. The only one in the City of New York, Thirty-five-five-five-five. Forty-forty-forty-forty-forty. Look at those legs! Back it into the light, Willie. Let the light fall on those legs!"

Willie, a sort of acolyte, manoeuvred the chair as directed. Reggie van Tuyl, who had been yawning in a hopeless sort of way showed his first flicker of interest.

"Willie," he observed, eyeing that youth more with pity than reproach, "has a face like Jo-Jo the dog-faced boy, don't you think so?"

Archie nodded briefly. Precisely the same criticism had occurred to him.

"Forty-five-five-five-five-five," chanted the high-priest. "Once forty-five. Twice forty-five. Third and last call, forty-five. Sold at forty-five. Gentleman in the fifth row."

Archie looked up and down the row with a keen eye. He was anxious to see who had been chump enough to give forty-five dollars for such a frightful object. He became aware of the dog-faced Willie leaning towards him.

"Name, please?" said the canine one.

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"Eh, what?" said Archie. "Oh, my name's Moffam, don't you know." The eyes of the multitude made him feel a little nervous. "Er—glad to meet you and all that sort of rot."

"Ten dollars deposit, please," said Willie.

"I don't absolutely follow you, old bean. What is the big thought at the back of all this?"

"Ten dollars deposit on the chair."

"What chair?"

"You bid forty-five dollars for the chair."

"Me?"

"You nodded," said Willie, accusingly. "If," he went on, reasoning closely, "You didn't want to bid, why did you nod?"

Archie was embarrassed. He could, of course, have pointed out that he had merely nodded in adhesion to the statement that the other had a face like Jo-Jo the dog-faced boy; but something seemed to tell him that a purist might consider the excuse deficient in tact. He hesitated a moment, then handed over a ten-dollar bill, the price of Willie's feelings. Willie withdrew like a tiger slinking from the body of its victim.

"I say, old thing," said Archie to Reggie, "this is a bit thick, you know. No purse will stand this drain."

Reggie considered the matter. His face seemed drawn under the mental strain.

"Don't nod again," he advised. "If you aren't careful, you get into the habit of it. When you want to bid, just twiddle your fingers. Yes, that's the thing. Twiddle!"

He sighed drowsily. The atmosphere of the auction room was close; you weren't allowed to smoke: and altogether he was beginning to regret that he had come. The service continued. Objects of varying unattractiveness came and went, eulogised by the officiating priest, but coldly received by the congregation. Relations between the former and the latter were growing more and more distant. The congregation seemed to suspect the priest of having an ulterior motive in his eulogies, and the priest seemed to suspect the congregation of a frivolous desire to waste his time. He had begun to speculate openly as to why they were there at all. Once, when a particularly repellent statuette of a nude female with an unwholesome green skin had been offered at two dollars and had found no bidders—the congregation appearing silently grateful for his statement that it was the only specimen of its kind on the continent—he had specifically accused them of having

come into the auction room merely with the purpose of sitting down and taking the weight off their feet.

"If your thing—your whatever-it-is, doesn't come up soon, Archie," said Reggie, fighting off with an effort the mists of sleep, "I rather think I shall be toddling along. What was it you came to get?"

"It's rather difficult to describe. It's a rummy-looking sort of what-not, made of china or something. I call it Pongo. At least, this one isn't Pongo, don't you know—it's his little brother, but presumably equally foul in every respect. It's all rather complicated, I know, but—hallo! He pointed excitedly. "By Jove! We're off! There it is! Look! Willie's unleashing it now!"

Willie, who had disappeared through the gold curtain, had now returned, and was placing on a pedestal a small china figure of delicate workmanship. It was the figure of a warrior in a suit of armour advancing with raised spear upon an adversary. A thrill permeated Archie's frame. Parker had not been mistaken. This was undoubtedly the companion-figure to the redoubtable Pongo. The two were identical. Even from where he sat Archie could detect on the features of the figure on the pedestal the same expression of insufferable complacency which had alienated his sympathies from the original Pongo.

The high-priest, undaunted by previous rebuffs, regarded the figure with a gloating enthusiasm wholly unshared by the congregation, who were plainly looking upon Pongo's little brother as just another of those things.

"This," he said, with a shake in his voice, "is something very special. China figure, said to date back to the Ming Dynasty. Unique. Nothing like it on either side of the Atlantic. If I were selling this at Christie's in London, where people," he said, nastily, "have an educated appreciation of the beautiful, the rare, and the exquisite, I should start the bidding at a thousand dollars. This afternoon's experience has taught me that that might possibly be too high." His pince-nez sparkled militantly, as he gazed upon the stolid throng. "Will anyone offer me a dollar for this unique figure?"

"Leap at it, old top," said Reggie van Tuyl. "Twiddle, dear boy, twiddle! A dollar's reasonable."

Archie twiddled.

"One dollar I am offered," said the high-priest, bitterly. "One gentleman here is not afraid to take a chance. One gentleman here

knows a good thing when he sees one." He abandoned the gently sarcastic manner for one of crisp and direct reproach. "Come, come, gentlemen, we are not here to waste time. Will anyone offer me one hundred dollars for this superb piece of——" He broke off, and seemed for a moment almost unnerved. He stared at someone in one of the seats in front of Archie. "Thank you," he said, with a sort of gulp. "One hundred dollars I am offered! One hundred—one hundred—one hundred——"

Archie was startled. This sudden, tremendous jump, this wholly unforeseen boom in Pongos, if one might so describe it, was more than a little disturbing. He could not see who his rival was, but it was evident that at least one among those present did not intend to allow Pongo's brother to slip by without a fight. He looked helplessly at Reggie for counsel, but Reggie had now definitely given up the struggle. Exhausted nature had done its utmost, and now he was leaning back with closed eyes, breathing softly through his nose. Thrown on his own resources, Archie could think of no better course than to twiddle his fingers again. He did so, and the high-priest's chant took on a note of positive exuberance.

"Two hundred I am offered. Much better! Turn the pedestal round, Willie, and let them look at it. Slowly! Slowly! You aren't spinning a roulette-wheel. Two hundred. Two-two-two-two-two." He became suddenly lyrical. "Two-two-two—There was a young lady named Lou, who was catching a train at two-two. Said the porter, 'Don't worry or hurry or scurry. It's a minute or two to two-two!' Two-two-two-two-two!"

Archie's concern increased. He seemed to be twiddling at this voluble man across seas of misunderstanding. Nothing is harder to interpret to a nicety than a twiddle, and Archie's idea of the language of twiddles and the high-priest's idea did not coincide by a mile. The high-priest appeared to consider that, when Archie twiddled, it was his intention to bid in hundreds, whereas in fact Archie had meant to signify that he raised the previous bid by just one dollar. Archie felt that, if given time, he could make this clear to the high-priest, but the latter gave him no time. He had got his audience, so to speak, on the run, and he proposed to hustle them before they could rally.

"Two hundred—two hundred—two—three—thank you, sir—three - three - three - four - four - five - five - six - six - seven - seven-seven——"

Archie sat limply in his wooden chair. He was conscious of a

feeling which he had only experienced twice in his life—once when he had taken his first lesson in driving a motor and had trodden on the accelerator instead of the brake; the second time more recently, when he had made his first down-trip on an express lift. He had now precisely the same sensation of being run away with by an uncontrollable machine, and of having left most of his internal organs at some little distance from the rest of his body. Emerging from this welter of emotion, stood out the one clear fact that, be the opposition bidding what it might, he must nevertheless secure the prize. Lucille had sent him to New York expressly to do so. She had sacrificed her jewellery for the cause. She relied on him. The enterprise had become for Archie something almost sacred. He felt dimly like a knight of old hot on the track of the Holy Grail.

He twiddled again. The ring and the bracelet had fetched nearly twelve hundred dollars. Up to that figure his hat was in the ring.

"Eight hundred I am offered. Eight hundred. Eight-eight-eight-eight—"

A voice spoke from somewhere at the back of the room. A quiet, cold, nasty, determined voice.

"Nine!"

Archie rose from his seat and spun round. This mean attack from the rear stung his fighting spirit. As he rose, a young man sitting immediately in front of him rose too and stared likewise. He was a square-built resolute-looking young man, who reminded Archie vaguely of somebody he had seen before. But Archie was too busy trying to locate the man at the back to pay much attention to him. He detected him at last, owing to the fact that the eyes of everybody in that part of the room were fixed upon him. He was a small man of middle age, with tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles. He might have been a professor or something of the kind. Whatever he was, he was obviously a man to be reckoned with. He had a rich sort of look, and his demeanour was the demeanour of a man who is prepared to fight it out on these lines, if it takes all the summer.

"Nine hundred I am offered. Nine-nine-nine-nine—"

Archie glared defiantly at the spectacled man.

"A thousand!" he cried.

The irruption of high finance into the placid course of the afternoon's proceedings had stirred the congregation out of its

lethargy. There were excited murmurs. Necks were craned, feet shuffled. As for the high-priest, his cheerfulness was now more than restored, and his faith in his fellow-man had soared from the depths to a very lofty altitude. He beamed with approval. Despite the warmth of his praise he would have been quite satisfied to see Pongo's little brother go at twenty dollars, and the reflection that the bidding had already reached one thousand and that his commission was twenty per cent. had engendered a mood of sunny happiness.

"One thousand is bid!" he carolled. "Now gentlemen, I don't want to hurry you over this. You are all connoisseurs here, and you don't want to see a priceless china figure of the Ming Dynasty get away from you at a sacrifice price. Perhaps you can't all see the figure where it is. Willie, take it round and show it to 'em. We'll take a little intermission while you look carefully at this wonderful figure. Get a move on, Willie! Pick up your feet!"

Archie, sitting dazedly, was aware that Reggie van Tuyl had finished his beauty sleep and was addressing the young man in the seat in front.

"Why, hallo," said Reggie. "I didn't know you were back. You remember me, don't you? Reggie van Tuyl. I know your sister very well. Archie, old man, I want you to meet my friend, Bill Brewster. Why, dash it!" He chuckled sleepily. "I was forgetting. Of course! He's your——"

"How are you?" said the young man. "Talking of my sister," he said to Reggie, "I suppose you haven't met her husband by any chance? I suppose you know she married some awful chump?"

"Me," said Archie.

"How's that?"

"I married your sister. My name's Moffam."

The young man seemed a trifle taken aback. "Sorry," he said.

"Not at all," said Archie.

"I was only going by what my father said in his letters," he explained, in extenuation.

Archie nodded.

"I'm afraid your jolly old father doesn't appreciate me. But I'm hoping for the best. If I can rope in that rummy-looking little china thing that Jo-Jo the dog faced boy is showing the customers, he will be all over me. I mean to say, you know, he's got another like it, and if he can get a full house, as it were, I'm given to understand he'll be bucked, cheered, and even braced."

The young man stared.

"Are *you* the fellow who's been bidding against me?"

"Eh, what? Were you bidding against *me*?"

"I wanted to buy the thing for my father. I've a special reason for wanting to get in right with him just now. Are you buying it for him, too?"

"Absolutely. As a surprise. It was Lucille's idea. His valet a chappie named Parker, tipped us off that the thing was to be sold."

"Parker? Great Scot! It was Parker who tipped *me* off. I met him on Broadway, and he told me about it."

"Rummy he never mentioned it in his letter to me. Why, dash it we could have got the thing for about two dollars if we had pooled our bids."

"Well, we'd better pool them now, and extinguish that pill at the back there. I can't go above eleven hundred. That's all I've got."

"I can't go above eleven hundred myself."

"There's just one thing. I wish you'd let me be the one to hand the thing over to father. I've a special reason for wanting to make a hit with him."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, magnanimously. "It's all the same to me. I only wanted to get him generally braced, as it were, if you know what I mean."

"That's awfully good of you."

"Not a bit, laddie, no, no, and far from it. Only too glad."

Willie had returned from his rambles among the connoisseurs, and Pongo's brother was back on his pedestal. The high-priest cleared his throat and resumed his discourse.

"Now that you have all seen this superb figure we will—I was offered one thousand—one thousand-one-one-one-one—eleven hundred. Thank you, sir. Eleven hundred I am offered."

The high-priest was now exuberant. You could see him doing figures in his head.

"You do the bidding," said Brother Bill.

"Right-o!" said Archie.

He waved a defiant hand.

"Thirteen," said the man at the back.

"Fourteen, dash it!"

"Fifteen!"

"Sixteen!"

"Seventeen!"

"Eighteen!"

"Nineteen!"

"Two thousand!"

The high-priest did everything but sing. He radiated good will and bonhomie.

"Two thousand I am offered. Is there any advance on two thousand? Come, gentlemen, I don't want to give this superb figure away. Twenty-one hundred. Twenty-one-one-one-one. This is more the sort of thing I have been accustomed to. When I was at Sotheby's Rooms in London, this kind of bidding was a common-place. Twenty-two-two-two-two-two. One hardly noticed it. Three-three-three. Twenty-three-three-three. Twenty-three hundred dollars I am offered."

He gazed expectantly at Archie, as a man gazes at some favourite dog whom he calls upon to perform a trick. But Archie had reached the end of his tether. The hand that had twiddled so often and so bravely lay inert beside his trouser-leg, twitching feebly. Archie was through.

"Twenty-three hundred," said the high-priest, ingratiatingly.

Archie made no movement. There was a tense pause. The high-priest gave a little sigh, like one waking from a beautiful dream.

"Twenty-three hundred," he said. "Once twenty-three. Twice twenty-three. Third last, and final call, twenty-three. Sold at twenty-three hundred. I congratulate you, sir, on a genuine bargain!"

Reggie van Tuyl had dozed off again. Archie tapped his brother-in-law on the shoulder.

"May as well be popping, what?"

They threaded their way sadly together through the crowd, and made for the street. They passed into Fifth Avenue without breaking the silence.

"Bally nuisance," said Archie, at last.

"Rotten!"

"Wonder who that chappie was?"

"Some collector, probably."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Archie.

Brother Bill attached himself to Archie's arm, and became communicative.

"I didn't want to mention it in front of van Tuyl," he said, "because he's such a talking-machine, and it would have been all

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

over New York before dinner-time. But you're one of the family, and you can keep a secret."

"Absolutely! Silent tomb and what not."

"The reason I wanted that darned thing was because I've just got engaged to a girl over in England, and I thought that, if I could hand my father that china figure-thing with one hand and break the news with the other, it might help a bit. She's the most wonderful girl!"

"I'll bet she is," said Archie, cordially.

"The trouble is she's in the chorus of one of the revues over there, and father is apt to kick. So I thought—oh, well, it's no good worrying now. Come along where it's quiet, and I'll tell you all about her."

"That'll be jolly," said Archie.

CHAPTER XI

SALVATORE CHOOSES THE WRONG MOMENT

ARCHIE reclaimed the family jewellery from its temporary home next morning; and, having done so, sauntered back to the Cosmopolis. He was surprised, on entering the lobby, to meet his father-in-law. More surprising still, Mr. Brewster was manifestly in a mood of extraordinary geniality. Archie could hardly believe his eyes when the other waved cheerily to him—nor his ears a moment later when Mr. Brewster, addressing him as “my boy,” asked him how he was and mentioned that the day was a warm one.

Obviously this jovial frame of mind must be taken advantage of; and Archie’s first thought was of the downtrodden Salvatore, to the tale of whose wrongs he had listened so sympathetically on the previous day. Now was plainly the moment for the waiter to submit his grievance, before some ebb-tide caused the milk of human kindness to flow out of Daniel Brewster. With a swift “Cheerio!” in his father-in-law’s direction, Archie bounded into the grill-room. Salvatore, the hour for luncheon being imminent but not yet having arrived, was standing against the far wall in an attitude of thought.

“Laddie!” cried Archie.

“Sare?”

“A most extraordinary thing has happened. Good old Brewster has suddenly popped up through a trap and is out in the lobby now. And what’s still more weird, he’s apparently bucked.”

“Sare?”

“Braced, you know. In the pink. Pleased about something. If you go to him now with that yarn of yours, you can’t fail. He’ll kiss you on both cheeks and give you his bank-roll and collar-stud. Charge along and ask the head-waiter if you can have ten minutes off.”

Salvatore vanished in search of the potentate named, and Archie returned to the lobby to bask in the unwonted sunshine.

“Well, well, well, what!” he said. “I thought you were at Brookport.”

"I came up this morning to meet a friend of mine," replied Mr. Brewster genially. "Professor Binstead."

"Don't think I know him."

"Very interesting man," said Mr. Brewster, still with the same uncanny amiability. "He's a dabbler in a good many things—science, phrenology, antiques. I asked him to bid for me at a sale yesterday. There was a little china figure——"

Archie's jaw fell.

"China figure?" he stammered feebly.

"Yes. The companion to one you may have noticed on my mantelpiece upstairs. I have been trying to get the pair of them for years. I should never have heard of this one if it had not been for that valet of mine. Parker. Very good of him to let me know of it, considering I had fired him. Ah, here is Binstead." He moved to greet the small, middle-aged man with the tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles who was bustling across the lobby. "Well, Binstead, so you got it?"

"Yes."

"I suppose the price wasn't particularly stiff?"

"Twenty-three hundred."

"Twenty-three hundred!" Mr. Brewster seemed to reel in his tracks. "Twenty-three *hundred!*"

"You gave me *carte blanche*."

"Yes, but twenty-three hundred!"

"I could have got it for a few dollars, but unfortunately I was a little late, and, when I arrived, some young fool had bid it up to a thousand, and he stuck to me till I finally shook him off at twenty-three hundred. Why, this is the very man! Is he a friend of yours?"

Archie coughed.

"More a relation than a friend, what? Son-on-law, don't you know!"

Mr. Brewster's amiability had vanished.

"What damned foolery have you been up to *now!*" he demanded. "Can't I move a step without stubbing my toe on you? Why the devil did you bid?"

"We thought it would be rather a fruity scheme. We talked it over and came to the conclusion that it was an egg. Wanted to get hold of the rummy little object, don't you know, and surprise you."

"Who's we?"

"Lucille and I."

"But how did you hear of it at all?"

"Parker, the valet-chappie, you know, wrote me a letter about it."

"Parker! Didn't he tell you that he had told me the figure was to be sold?"

"Absolutely not!" A sudden suspicion came to Archie. He was normally a guileless young man, but even to him the extreme fishiness of the part played by Herbert Parker had become apparent. "I say, you know, it looks to me as if friend Parker had been having us all on a bit, what? I mean to say it was jolly old Herb. who tipped your son off—Bill, you know—to go and bid for the thing."

"Bill! Was Bill there?"

"Absolutely in person! We were bidding against each other like the dickens till we managed to get together and get acquainted. And then this bird—this gentleman—sailed in and started to slip it across us."

Professor Binstead chuckled—the care-free chuckle of a man who sees all those around him smitten in the pocket, while he himself remains untouched.

"A very ingenious rogue, this Parker of yours, Brewster. His method seems to have been simple but masterly. I have no doubt that either he or a confederate obtained the figure and placed it with the auctioneer, and then he ensured a good price for it by getting us all to bid against each other. Very ingenious!"

Mr. Brewster struggled with his feelings. Then he seemed to overcome them and to force himself to look on the bright side.

"Well, anyway," he said, "I've got the pair of figures, and that's what I wanted. Is that it in that parcel?"

"This is it. I wouldn't trust an express company to deliver it. Suppose we go up to your room and see how the two look side by side."

They crossed the lobby to the lift. The cloud was still on Mr. Brewster's brow as they stepped out and made their way to his suite. Like most men who have risen from poverty to wealth by their own exertions, Mr. Brewster objected to parting with his money unnecessarily, and it was plain that that twenty-three hundred dollars still rankled.

Mr. Brewster unlocked the door and crossed the room. Then, suddenly, he halted, stared, and stared again. He sprang to the bell and pressed it, then stood gurgling wordlessly.

"Anything wrong, old bean?" queried Archie, solicitously.

"Wrong! Wrong! It's gone!"

"Gone?"

"The figure!"

The floor-waiter had manifested himself silently in answer to the bell, and was standing in the doorway.

"Simmons!" Mr. Brewster turned to him wildly. "Has anyone been in this suite since I went away?"

"No, sir."

"Nobody?"

"Nobody except your valet, sir—Parker. He said he had come to fetch some things away. I supposed he had come from you, sir, with instructions."

"Get out!"

Professor Binstead had unwrapped his parcel, and had placed Pongo on the table. There was a weighty silence. Archie picked up the little china figure and balancing it on the palm of his hand. It was a small thing, he reflected philosophically, but it had made quite a stir in the world.

Mr. Brewster fermented for a while without speaking.

"So," he said, at last, in a voice trembling with self-pity, "I have been to all this trouble——"

"And expense," put in Professor Binstead, gently.

"Merely to buy back something which had been stolen from me! And, owing to your damned officiousness," he cried, turning on Archie, "I have had to pay twenty-three hundred dollars for it! I don't know why they make such a fuss about Job. Job never had anything like you around!"

"Of course," argued Archie, "he had one or two boils."

"Boils! What are boils?"

"Dashed sorry," murmured Archie. "Acted for the best. Meant well. And all that sort of rot!"

Professor Binstead's mind seemed occupied, to the exclusion of all other aspects of the affair, with the ingenuity of the absent Parker.

"A cunning scheme!" he said. "A very cunning scheme! This man Parker must have a brain of no low order. I should like to feel his bumps!"

"I should like to give him some!" said the stricken Mr. Brewster. He breathed a deep breath. "Oh, well," he said, "situated as I am, with a crook valet and an imbecile son-in-law, I suppose I ought to be thankful that I've still got my own property, even if I

have had to pay twenty-three hundred dollars for the privilege of keeping it." He rounded on Archie, who was in a reverie. The thought of the unfortunate Bill had just crossed Archie's mind. It would be many moons, many weary moons, before Mr. Brewster would be in a suitable mood to listen sympathetically to the story of love's young dream. "Give me that figure!"

Archie continued to toy absently with Pongo. He was wondering now how best to break this sad occurrence to Lucille. It would be a disappointment for the poor girl.

"Give me that figure!"

Archie started violently. There was an instant in which Pongo seemed to hang suspended, like Mohammed's coffin, between heaven and earth, then the force of gravity asserted itself. Pongo fell with a sharp crack and disintegrated. And as it did so there was a knock at the door, and in walked a dark, furtive person, who to the inflamed vision of Mr. Daniel Brewster looked like something connected with the executive staff of the Black Hand. With all time at his disposal, the unfortunate Salvatore had selected this moment for stating his case.

"Get out!" bellowed Mr. Brewster. "I didn't ring for a waiter."

Archie, his mind reeling beneath the catastrophe, recovered himself sufficiently to do the honours. It was at his instigation that Salvatore was there, and, greatly as he wished that he could have seen fit to choose a more auspicious moment for his business chat, he felt compelled to do his best to see him through.

"Oh, I say, half a second," he said. "You don't quite understand. As a matter of fact, this chappie is by way of being down-trodden and oppressed and what not, and I suggested that he should get hold of you and speak a few well-chosen words. Of course, if you'd rather—some other time——"

But Mr. Brewster was not permitted to postpone the interview. Before he could get his breath, Salvatore had begun to talk. He was a strong, ambidextrous talker, whom it was hard to interrupt; and it was not for some moments that Mr. Brewster succeeded in getting a word in. When he did, he spoke to the point. Though not a linguist, he had been able to follow the discourse closely enough to realise that the waiter was dissatisfied with conditions in his hotel; and Mr. Brewster, as has been indicated, had a short way with people who criticised the Cosmopolis.

"You're fired!" said Mr. Brewster.

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie.

Salvatore muttered what sounded like a passage from Dante.

"Fired!" repeated Mr. Brewster resolutely. "And I wish to heaven," he added, eyeing his son-in-law malignantly, "I could fire *you*!"

"Well," said Professor Binstead cheerfully, breaking the grim silence which followed this outburst, "If you will give me your cheque, Brewster, I think I will be going. Two thousand three hundred dollars. Make it open, if you will, and then I can run round the corner and cash it before lunch. That will be capital!"

CHAPTER XII

BRIGHT EYES — AND A FLY

THE Hermitage (unrivalled scenery, superb cuisine, Daniel Brewster, proprietor) was a picturesque summer hotel in the green heart of the mountains, built by Archie's father-in-law shortly after he assumed control of Cosmopolis. Mr. Brewster himself seldom went there, preferring to concentrate his attention on his New York establishment; and Archie and Lucille, breakfasting in the airy dining-room some ten days after the incidents recorded in the last chapter, had consequently to be content with two out of the three advertised attractions of the place. Through the window at their side quite a slab of the unrivalled scenery was visible; some of the superb cuisine was already on the table; and the fact that the eye searched in vain for Daniel Brewster, proprietor, filled Archie, at any rate, with no sense of aching loss. He bore it with equanimity and even with positive enthusiasm. In Archie's opinion, practically all a place needed to make it an earthly Paradise, was for Mr. Daniel Brewster to be about forty-seven miles away from it. It was at Lucille's suggestion that they had come to the Hermitage. Never a human sunbeam, Mr. Brewster had shown such a bleak front to the world, and particularly to his son-in-law, in the days following the Pongo incident, that Lucille had thought that he and Archie would for a time at least be better apart—a view with which her husband cordially agreed. He had enjoyed his stay at the Hermitage, and now he regarded the eternal hills with the comfortable affection of a healthy man who is breakfasting well.

"It's going to be another perfectly topping day," he observed, eyeing the shimmering land-scape, from which the morning mists were swiftly shredding away like faint puffs of smoke. "Just the day you ought to have been here."

"Yes, it's too bad I've got to go. New York will be like an oven."

"Put it off."

"I can't, I'm afraid. I've a fitting."

Archie argued no further. He was a married man of old enough standing to know the importance of fittings.

"Besides," said Lucille, "I want to see father." Archie re-

pressed an exclamation of astonishment. "I'll be back to-morrow evening. You will be perfectly happy."

"Queen of my soul, you know I can't be happy with you away. You know——"

"Yes?" murmured Lucille, appreciatively. She never tired of hearing Archie say this sort of thing.

Archie's voice had trailed off. He was looking across the room.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "What an awfully pretty woman!"

"Where?"

"Over there. Just coming in. I say, what wonderful eyes! I don't think I ever saw such eyes. Did you notice her eyes? Sort of flashing! Awfully pretty woman!"

Warm though the morning was, a suspicion of chill descended upon the breakfast-table. A certain coldness seemed to come into Lucille's face. She could not always share Archie's fresh young enthusiasms.

"Do you think so?"

"Wonderful figure, too!"

"Yes?"

"Well, what I mean to say, fair to medium," said Archie, recovering a certain amount of that intelligence which raises man above the level of the beasts of the field. "Not the sort of type I admire myself, of course."

"You know her, don't you?"

"Absolutely not and far from it," said Archie, hastily. "Never met her in my life."

"You've seen her on the stage. Her name's Vera Silverton. We saw her in——"

"Of course, yes. So we did. I say, I wonder what she's doing here? She ought to be in New York rehearsing. I remember meeting what's-his-name—you know—chappie who writes plays and what not—George Benham—I remember meeting George Benham, and he told me she was rehearsing in a piece of his called—I forget the name, but I know it was called something or other. Well, why isn't she?"

"She probably lost her temper and broke her contract and came away. She's always doing that sort of thing. She's known for it. She must be a horrid woman."

"Yes."

"I don't want to talk about her. She used to be married to someone, and she divorced him. And then she was married to

someone else, and he divorced her. And I'm certain her hair wasn't that colour two years ago, and I don't think a woman ought to make up like that, and her dress is all wrong for the country, and those pearls can't be genuine, and I hate the way she rolls her eyes about, and pink doesn't suit her a bit. I think she's an awful woman, and I wish you wouldn't keep on talking about her.

"Right-o!" said Archie, dutifully.

They finished breakfast, and Lucille went up to pack her bag. Archie strolled out on to the terrace outside the hotel, where he smoked, communed with Nature, and thought of Lucille. He always thought of Lucille when he was alone, especially when he chanced to find himself in poetic surroundings like those provided by the unrivalled scenery encircling the Hotel Hermitage. The longer he was married to her the more did the sacred institution seem to him a good egg. Mr. Brewster might regard their marriage as one of the world's most unfortunate incidents, but to Archie it was, and always had been, a bit of all right. The more he thought of it the more did he marvel that a girl like Lucille should have been content to link her lot with that of a Class C specimen like himself. His meditations were, in fact, precisely what a happily-married man's meditations ought to be.

He was roused from them by a species of exclamation or cry almost at his elbow, and turned to find that the spectacular Miss Silverton was standing beside him. Her dubious hair gleamed in the sunlight, and one of the criticised eyes was screwed up. The other gazed at Archie with an expression of appeal.

"There's something in my eye," she said.

"No, really!"

"I wonder if you would mind? It would be so kind of you!"

Archie would have preferred to remove himself, but no man worthy of the name can decline to come to the rescue of womanhood in distress. To twist the lady's upper lid back and peer into it and jab at it with the corner of his handkerchief was the only course open to him. His conduct may be classed as not merely blameless but definitely praiseworthy. King Arthur's knights used to do this sort of thing all the time, and look what people think of them. Lucille, therefore, coming out of the hotel just as the operation was concluded, ought not to have felt the annoyance she did. But, of course, there is a certain superficial intimacy about the attitude of a man who is taking a fly out of woman's eye which may excusably jar upon the sensibilities of his wife. It is an

attitude which suggests a sort of *rapprochement* or *camaraderie* or, as Archie would have put it, what not.

"Thanks so much!" said Miss Silverton.

"Oh no, rather not," said Archie.

"Such a nuisance getting things in your eye."

"Absolutely!"

"I'm always doing it!"

"Rotten luck!"

"But I don't often find anyone as clever as you to help me."

Lucille felt called upon to break in on this feast of reason and flow of soul.

"Archie," she said, "if you go and get your clubs now, I shall just have time to walk round with you before my train goes."

"Oh, ah!" said Archie, perceiving her for the first time. "Oh, ah, yes, right-o, yes, yes, yes!"

On the way to the first tee it seemed to Archie that Lucille was distraught and abstracted in her manner; and it occurred to him, not for the first time in his life, what a poor support a clear conscience is in moments of crisis. Dash it all, he didn't see what else he could have done. Couldn't leave the poor female staggering about the place with squads of flies wedged in her eyeball. Nevertheless——

"Rotten thing getting a fly in your eye," he hazarded at length. "Dashed awkward, I mean."

"Or convenient."

"Eh?"

"Well, it's a very good way of dispensing with an introduction."

"Oh, I say! You don't mean you think——"

"She's a horrid woman!"

"Absolutely! Can't think what people see in her."

"Well, you seemed to enjoy fussing over her!"

"No, no! Nothing of the kind! She inspired me with absolute what-d'you-call-it—the sort of thing chappies do get inspired with, you know."

"You were beaming all over your face."

"I wasn't. I was just screwing up my face because the sun was in my eye."

"All sorts of things seem to be in people's eyes this morning!"

Archie was saddened. That this sort of mis-understanding should have occurred on such a topping day and at a moment when they were to be torn asunder for about thirty-six hours

made him feel—well, it gave him the pip. He had an idea that there were words which would have straightened everything out, but he was not an eloquent young man and could not find them. He felt aggrieved. Lucille, he considered, ought to have known that he was immune as regarded females with flashing eyes and experimentally-coloured hair. Why, dash it, he could have extracted flies from the eyes of Cleopatra with one hand and Helen of Troy with the other, simultaneously, without giving them a second thought. It was in depressed mood that he played a listless nine holes; nor had life brightened for him when he came back to the hotel two hours later, after seeing Lucille off in the train to New York. Never till now had they had anything remotely resembling a quarrel. Life, Archie felt, was a bit of a wash-out. He was disturbed and jumpy, and the sight of Miss Silverton, talking to somebody on a settee in the corner of the hotel lobby, sent him shooting off at right angles and brought him up with a bump against the desk behind which the room-clerk sat.

The room-clerk, always of a chatty disposition, was saying something to him, but Archie did not listen. He nodded mechanically. It was something about his room. He caught the word "satisfactory."

"Oh, rather, quite!" said Archie.

A fussy devil, the room-clerk! He knew perfectly well that Archie found his room satisfactory. These chappies gassed on like this so as to try to make you feel that the management took a personal interest in you. It was part of their job. Archie beamed absently and went in to lunch. Lucille's empty seat stared at him mournfully, increasing his sense of desolation.

He was half-way through his lunch, when the chair opposite ceased to be vacant. Archie, transferring his gaze from the scenery outside the window, perceived that his friend, George Benham, the playwright, had materialized from nowhere and was now in his midst.

"Hallo!" he said.

George Benham was a grave young man whose spectacles gave him the look of a mournful owl. He seemed to have something on his mind besides the artistically straggling mop of black hair which swept down over his brow. He sighed wearily, and ordered fish-pie.

"I thought I saw you come through the lobby just now," he said.

"Oh, was that you on the settee, talking to Miss Silverton?"

"She was talking to *me*," said the playwright, moodily.

"What are you doing here?" asked Archie. He could have wished Mr. Benham elsewhere, for he intruded on his gloom, but the chappie being amongst those present, it was only civil to talk to him. "I thought you were in New York, watching the rehearsals of your jolly old drama."

"The rehearsals are hung up. And it looks as though there wasn't going to be any drama. Good Lord!" cried George Benham, with honest warmth, "with opportunities opening out before one on every side—with life extending prizes to one with both hands—when you see coal-heavers making fifty dollars a week and the fellows who clean out the sewers going happy and singing about their work—why does a man deliberately choose a job like writing plays? Job was the only man that ever lived who was really qualified to write a play, and he would have found it pretty tough going if his leading woman had been anyone like Vera Silverton!"

Archie—and it was this fact, no doubt, which accounted for his possession of such a large and varied circle of friends—was always able to shelve his own troubles in order to listen to other people's hard-luck stories.

"Tell me all, laddie," he said. "Release the film! Has she walked out on you?"

"Left us flat! How did you hear about it? Oh, she told you, of course?"

Archie hastened to try to dispel the idea that he was on any such terms of intimacy with Miss Silverton.

"No, no! My wife said she thought it must be something of that nature or order when we saw her come in to breakfast. I mean to say," said Archie, reasoning closely, "woman can't come in to breakfast here and be rehearsing in New York at the same time. Why did she administer the raspberry, old friend?"

Mr. Benham helped himself to fish-pie, and spoke dully through the steam.

"Well, what happened was this. Knowing her as intimately as you do——"

"I *don't* know her!"

"Well, anyway, it was like this. As you know, she has a dog——"

"I didn't know she had a dog," protested Archie. It seemed to him that the world was in conspiracy to link him with this woman.

"Well, she has a dog. A beastly great whacking brute of a bull-

dog. And she brings it to rehearsal." Mr. Benham's eyes filled with tears, as in his emotion he swallowed a mouthful of fish-pie some eighty-three degrees Fahrenheit hotter than it looked. In the intermission caused by this disaster his agile mind skipped a few chapters of the story, and, when he was able to speak again, he said, "So then there was a lot of trouble. Everything broke loose!"

"Why?" Archie was puzzled. "Did the management object to her bringing the dog to rehearsal?"

"A lot of good that would have done! She does what she likes in the theatre."

"Then why was there trouble?"

"You weren't listening," said Mr. Benham, reproachfully. "I told you. This dog came snuffling up to where I was sitting—it was quite dark in the body of the theatre, you know—and I got up to say something about something that was happening on the stage, and somehow I must have given it a push with my foot."

"I see," said Archie, beginning to get the run of the plot. "You kicked her dog."

"Pushed it. Accidently. With my foot."

"I understand. And when you brought off this kick——"

"Push," said Mr. Benham, austere.

"This kick or push. When you administered this kick or push——"

"It was more a sort of light shove."

"Well, when you did whatever you did, the trouble started?"

Mr. Benham gave a slight shiver.

"She talked for a while, and then walked out, taking the dog with her. You see, this wasn't the first time it has happened."

"Good Lord! Do you spend your whole time doing that sort of thing?"

"It wasn't me the first time. It was the stage-manager. He didn't know whose dog it was, and it came waddling on to the stage, and he gave it a sort of pat, a kind of flick——"

"A slosh?"

"Not a slosh," corrected Mr. Benham, firmly. "You might call it a tap—with the prompt-script. Well, we had a lot of difficulty smoothing her over that time. Still, we managed to do it, but she said that if anything of the sort occurred again she would chuck up her part."

"She must be fond of the dog," said Archie, for the first time feeling a touch of goodwill and sympathy towards the lady.

"She's crazy about it. That's what made it so awkward when I happened—quite inadvertently—to give it this sort of accidental shove. Well, we spent the rest of the day trying to get her on the 'phone at her apartment, and finally we heard that she had come here. So I took the next train, and tried to persuade her to come back. She wouldn't listen. And that's how matters stand."

"Pretty rotten!" said Archie, sympathetically.

"You can bet it's pretty rotten—for me. There's nobody else who can play the part. Like a chump, I wrote the thing specially for her. It means the play won't be produced at all, if she doesn't do it. So you're my last hope!"

Archie, who was lighting a cigarette, nearly swallowed it.

"I am?"

"I thought you might persuade her. Point out to her what a lot hangs on her coming back. Jolly her along. *You* know the sort of thing!"

"But, my dear old friend, I tell you I don't know her!"

Mr. Benham's eyes opened behind their zareba of glass.

"Well, she knows *you*. When you came through the lobby just now she said that you were the only real human being she had ever met."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I did take a fly out of her eye. But——"

"You did? Well, then, the whole thing's simple. All you have to do is to ask her how her eye is, and tell her she has the most beautiful eyes you ever saw, and coo a bit."

"But, my dear old son!" The frightful programme which his friend had mapped out stunned Archie. "I simply can't! Anything to oblige and all that sort of thing, but, when it comes to cooing, distinctly Napoo!"

"Nonsense! It isn't hard to coo."

"You don't understand, laddie. You're not a married man. I mean to say, whatever you say for or against marriage—personally I'm all for it and consider it a ripe egg—the fact remains that it practically makes a chappie a spent force as a cooer. I don't want to dish you in any way, old bean, but I must firmly and resolutely decline to coo."

Mr. Benham rose and looked at his watch.

"I'll have to be moving," he said. "I've got to get back to New York and report. I'll tell them that I haven't been able to do any-

thing myself, but that I've left the matter in good hands. I know you will do your best."

"But, laddie!"

"Think," said Mr. Benham, solemnly, "of all that depends on it! The other actors! The small-part people thrown out of a job! Myself—but no! Perhaps you had better touch very lightly or not at all on my connection with the thing. Well, you know how to handle it. I feel I can leave it to you. Pitch it strong! Good-bye, my dear old man, and a thousand thanks. I'll do the same for you another time." He moved towards the door, leaving Archie transfixed. Half-way there he turned and came back. "Oh, by the way," he said, "my lunch. Have it put on your bill, will you? I haven't time to stay and settle. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XIII

RALLYING ROUND PERCY

IT amazed Archie through the whole of a long afternoon to reflect how swiftly and unexpectedly the blue and brilliant sky of life can cloud over and with what abruptness a man who fancies that his feet are on solid ground can find himself immersed in Fate's gumbo. He recalled, with the bitterness with which one does recall such things, that that morning he had risen from his bed without a care in the world, his happiness unruffled even by the thought that Lucille would be leaving him for a short space. He had sung in his bath. Yes, he had chirruped like a bally linnet. And now——

Some men would have dismissed the unfortunate affairs of Mr. George Benham from their mind as having nothing to do with themselves, but Archie had never been made of this stern stuff. The fact that Mr. Benham, apart from being an agreeable companion with whom he had lunched occasionally in New York, had no claims upon him affected him little. He hated to see his fellow-man in trouble. On the other hand, what could he do? To seek Miss Silverton out and plead with her—even if he did it without cooing—would undoubtedly establish an intimacy between them which, instinct told him, might tinge her manner after Lucille's return with just that suggestion of Auld Lang Syne which makes things so awkward.

His whole being shrank from extending to Miss Silverton that inch which the female artistic temperament is so apt to turn into an ell; and when, just as he was about to go in to dinner, he met her in the lobby and she smiled brightly at him and informed him that her eye was now completely recovered, he shied away like a startled mustang of the prairie, and, abandoning his intention of worrying the table d'hôte in the same room with the amiable creature, tottered off to the smoking-room, where he did the best he could with sandwiches and coffee.

Having got through the time as best he could till eleven o'clock, he went up to bed.

The room to which he and Lucille had been assigned by the

management was on the second floor, pleasantly sunny by day and at night filled with cool and heartening fragrance of the pines. Hitherto Archie had always enjoyed taking a final smoke on the balcony overlooking the woods, but to-night such was his mental stress that he prepared to go to bed directly he had closed the door. He turned to the cupboard to get his pyjamas.

His first thought, when even after a second scrutiny no pyjamas were visible, was that this was merely another of those things which happen on days when life goes wrong. He raked the cupboard for a third time with an annoyed eye. From every hook hung various garments of Lucille's, but no pyjamas. He was breathing a soft malediction preparatory to embarking on a point-to-point hunt for his missing property, when something in the cupboard caught his eye and held for a moment puzzled.

He could have sworn that Lucille did not possess a mauve *negligée*. Why, she had told him a dozen times that mauve was a colour which she did not like. He frowned perplexedly; and as he did so, from near the window came a soft cough.

Archie spun round and subjected the room to as close a scrutiny as that which he had bestowed upon the cupboard. Nothing was visible. The window opening on to the balcony gaped wide. The balcony was manifestly empty.

"Urrf!"

This time there was no possibility of error. The cough had come from the immediate neighbourhood of the window.

Archie was conscious of a pringly sensation about the roots of his closely-cropped back-hair, as he moved cautiously across the room. The affair was becoming uncanny; and, as he tip-toed towards the window, old ghost-stories, read in lighter moments before cheerful fires with plenty of light in the room, flitted through his mind. He had the feeling—precisely as every chappie in those stories had had—that he was not alone.

Nor was he. In a basket behind an arm-chair, curled up, with his massive chin resting on the edge of the wicker-work, lay a fine bulldog.

"Urrf!" said the bulldog.

"Good God!" said Archie.

There was a lengthy pause, in which the bulldog looked earnestly at Archie and Archie looked earnestly at the bulldog.

Normally, Archie was a dog-lover. His hurry was never so great as to prevent him stopping, when in the street, and intro-

ducing himself to any dog he met. In a strange house, his first act was to assemble the canine population, roll it on its back or backs, and punch it in the ribs. As a boy, his earliest ambition had been to become a veterinary surgeon; and, though the years had cheated him of this career, he knew all about dogs, their points, their manners, their customs, and their treatment in sickness and in health. In short, he loved dogs, and, had they met under happier conditions, he would undoubtedly have been on excellent terms with this one within the space of a minute. But, as things were, he abstained from fraternising and continued to goggle dumbly.

And then his eye, wandering aside, collided with the following objects: a fluffy pink dressing-gown, hung over the back of a chair, an entirely strange suit-case, and, on the bureau, a photograph in a silver frame of a stout gentleman in evening-dress whom he had never seen before in his life.

Much has been written of the emotions of the wanderer who, returning to his childhood home, finds it altered out of all recognition; but poets have neglected the theme—far more poignant—of the man who goes up to his room in an hotel and finds it full of somebody else's dressing-gowns and bulldogs.

Bulldogs! Archie's heart jumped sideways and upwards with a wiggling movement, turned two somersaults, and stopped beating. The hideous truth, working its way slowly through the concrete, had at last penetrated to his brain. He was not only in somebody else's room, and a woman's at that. He was in the room belonging to Miss Vera Silverton.

He could not understand it. He would have been prepared to stake the last cent he could borrow from his father-in-law on the fact that he had made no error in the number over the door. Yet, nevertheless, such was the case, and, below par though his faculties were at the moment, he was sufficiently alert to perceive that it behoved him to withdraw.

He leaped to the door, and, as he did so, the handle began to turn.

The cloud which had settled on Archie's mind lifted abruptly. For an instant he was enabled to think about a hundred times more quickly than was his leisurely wont. Good fortune had brought him to within easy reach of the electric-light switch. He snapped it back, and was in darkness. Then, diving silently and

swiftly to the floor, he wriggled under the bed. The thud of his head against what appeared to be some sort of joist or support, unless it had been placed there by the maker as a practical joke, on the chance of this kind of thing happening some day, coincided with the creak of the opening door. Then the light was switched on again, and the bulldog in the corner gave a welcoming woofle.

"And how is mamma's precious angel?"

Rightly concluding that the remark had not been addressed to himself and that no social obligation demanded that he reply, Archie pressed his cheek against the boards and said nothing. The question was not repeated, but from the other side of the room came the sound of a patted dog.

"Did he think his muzzer had fallen down dead and was never coming up?"

The beautiful picture which these words conjured up filled Archie with that yearning for the might-have-been which is always so painful. He was finding his position physically as well as mentally distressing. It was cramped under the bed, and the boards were harder than anything he had ever encountered. Also, it appeared to be the practice of the housemaids at the Hotel Hermitage to use the space below the beds as a depository for all the dust which they swept off the carpet, and much of this was insinuating itself into his nose and mouth. The two things which Archie would have liked most to do at that moment were first to kill Miss Silverton—if possible, painfully—and then to spend the remainder of his life sneezing.

After a prolonged period he heard a drawer open, and noted the fact as promising. As the old married man, he presumed that it signified the putting away of hairpins. About now the dashed woman would be looking at herself in the glass with her hair down. Then she would brush it. Then she would twiddle it up into thingummies. Say, ten minutes for this. And after that she would go to bed and turn out the light, and he would be able, after giving her a bit of time to go to sleep, to creep out and leg it. Allowing at a conservative estimate three-quarters of——

"Come out!"

Archie stiffened. For an instant a feeble hope came to him that this remark, like the others, might be addressed to the dog.

"Come out from under that bed!" said a stern voice. "And mind how you come! I've got a pistol!"

"Well, I mean to say, you know," said Archie, in a propitiatory

voice, emerging from his lair like a tortoise and smiling as winningly as a man can who has just bumped his head against the leg of a bed, "I suppose all this seems fairly rummy, but——"

"For the love of Mike!" said Miss Silverton.

The point seemed to Archie well taken and the comment on the situation neatly expressed.

"What are you doing in my room?"

"Well, if it comes to that, you know—shouldn't have mentioned it if you hadn't brought the subject up in the course of general chit-chat—what are you doing in mine?"

"Yours?"

"Well, apparently there's been a bloomer of some species somewhere, but this was the room I had last night," said Archie.

"But the desk-clerk said that he had asked you if it would be quite satisfactory to you giving it up to me, and you said yes. I come here every summer, when I'm not working, and I always have this room."

"By Jove! I remember now. The chappie did say something to me about the room, but I was thinking of something else and it rather went over the top. So that's what he was talking about, was it?"

Miss Silverton was frowning. A moving-picture director, scanning her face, would have perceived that she was registering disappointment.

"Nothing breaks right for me in this darned world," she said, regretfully. "When I caught sight of your leg sticking out from under the bed, I did think that everything was all lined up for a real find ad. at last. I could close my eyes and see the thing in the papers. On the front page, with photographs: 'Plucky Actress Captures Burglar.' Darn it!"

"Fearfully sorry, you know!"

"I just needed something like that. I've got a Press-agent, and I will say for him that he eats well and sleeps well and has just enough intelligence to cash his monthly cheque without forgetting what he went into the bank for, but outside of that you can take it from me he's not one of the world's workers! He's about as much solid use to a girl with aspirations as a pain in the lower ribs. It's three weeks since he got me into print at all, and then the brightest thing he could think up was that my favourite breakfast-fruit was an apple. Well, I ask you!"

"Rotten!" said Archie.

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"I did think that for once my guardian angel had gone back to work and was doing something for me. 'Stage Star and Midnight Marauder,'" murmured Miss Silverton, wistfully. "'Footlight Favourite Foils Felon.'"

"Wait! I've got an idea!" The wistful sadness had gone from her manner. She was bright and alert. "Sit down!"

"Sit down?"

"Sure. Sit down and take the chill off the arm-chair. I've thought of something."

Archie sat down as directed. At his elbow the bulldog eyed him gravely from the basket.

"Do they know you in this hotel?"

"Know me? Well, I've been here about a week."

"I mean, do they know who you are? Do they know you're a good citizen?"

"Well, if it comes to that, I suppose they don't. But——"

"Fine!" said Miss Silverton, appreciatively. "Then it's all right. We can carry on!"

"Carry on!"

"Why, sure! All I want is to get the thing into the papers. It doesn't matter to me if it turns out later that there was a mistake and that you weren't a burglar trying for my jewels after all. It makes just as good a story either way. I can't think why that never struck me before. Here have I been kicking because you weren't a real burglar, when it doesn't amount to a hill of beans whether you are or not. All I've got to do is to rush out and yell and rouse the hotel, and they come in and pinch you, and I give the story to the papers, and everything's fine!"

Archie leaped from his chair. "I say! What!"

"What's on your mind?" enquired Miss Silverton, considerately. "Don't you think it's a nifty scheme?"

"Nifty! My dear old soul! It's frightful!"

"Can't see what's wrong with it," grumbled Miss Silverton. "After I've had someone get New York on the long-distance 'phone and give the story to the papers you can explain, and they'll let you out. Surely to goodness you don't object, as a personal favour to me, to spending an hour or two in a cell? Why, probably they haven't got a prison at all out in these parts, and you'll simply be locked in a room. A child of ten could do it on his head," said Miss Silverton. "A child of six," she amended.

"But, dash it—I mean—what I mean to say—I'm married!"

"Yes?" said Miss Silverton, with the politeness of faint interest. "I've been married myself. I wouldn't say it's altogether a bad thing, mind you, for those that like it, but a little of it goes a long way. My first husband," she proceeded, reminiscently, "was a travelling man. I gave him a two-weeks' try-out, and then I told him to go on travelling. My second husband—now, *he* wasn't a gentleman in any sense of the word. I remember once——"

"You don't grasp the point. The jolly old point! You fail to grasp it. If this bally thing comes out, my wife will be most frightfully sick!"

Miss Silverton regarded him with pained surprise.

"Do you mean to say you would let a little thing like that stand in the way of my getting on the front page of all the papers—*with* photographs? Where's your chivalry?"

"Never mind my dashed chivalry!"

"Besides, what does it matter if she does get a little sore? She'll soon get over it. You can put that right. Buy her a box of candy. Not that I'm strong for candy myself. What I always say is, it may taste good, but look what it does to your hips! I give you my honest word that, when I gave up eating candy, I lost eleven ounces the first week. My second husband—no, I'm a liar, it was my third—my third husband said—— Say, what's the big idea? Where are you going?"

"Out!" said Archie, firmly. "Bally out!"

A dangerous light flickered in Miss Silverton's eyes.

"That'll be all of that!" she said, raising the pistol. "You stay right where you are, or I'll fire!"

"Right-o!"

"I mean it!"

"My dear old soul," said Archie, "in the recent unpleasantness in France I had chappies popping off things like that at me all day and every day for close on five years, and here I am, what! I mean to say, if I've got to choose between staying here and being pinched in your room by the local constabulary and having the dashed thing get into the papers and all sorts of trouble happening, and my wife getting the wind up and—I say, if I've got to choose——"

"Suck a lozenge and start again!" said Miss Silverton.

"Well, what I mean to say is, I'd much rather take a chance of getting a bullet in the old bean than that. So loose it off and the best o' luck!"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

Miss Silverton lowered the pistol, sank into a chair, and burst into tears.

"I think you're the meanest man I ever met!" she sobbed. "You know perfectly well the bang would send me into a fit!"

"In that case," said Archie, relieved, "cheerio, good luck, pip-pip, toodle-oo, and good-bye-ee! I'll be shifting!"

"Yes, you will!" cried Miss Silverton, energetically, recovering with amazing swiftness from her collapse. "Yes, you will, I by no means suppose! You think, just because I'm no champion with a pistol, I'm helpless. You wait! Percy!"

"My name is not Percy."

"I never said it was. Percy! Percy, come to muzzer!"

There was a creaking rustle from behind the arm-chair. A heavy body flopped on the carpet. Out into the room, heaving himself along as though sleep had stiffened his joints, and breathing stertorously through his tilted nose, moved the fine bulldog. Seen in the open, he looked even more formidable than he had done in his basket.

"Guard him, Percy! Good dog, guard him! Oh, heavens! What's the matter with him?"

And with these words the emotional woman, uttering a wail of anguish, flung herself on the floor beside the animal.

Percy was, indeed, in manifestly bad shape. He seemed quite unable to drag his limbs across the room. There was a curious arch in his back, and, as his mistress touched him, he cried out plaintively.

"Percy! Oh, what is the matter with him? His nose is burning!"

Now was the time, with both sections of the enemy's forces occupied, for Archie to have departed softly from the room. But never, since the day when at the age of eleven he had carried a large, damp, and muddy terrier with a sore foot three miles and deposited him on the best sofa in his mother's drawing-room, had he been able to ignore the spectacle of a dog in trouble.

"He does look bad, what!"

"He's dying! Oh, he's dying! Is it distemper? He's never had distemper."

Archie regarded the sufferer with the grave eye of the expert. He shook his head.

"It's not that," he said. "Dogs with distemper make a sort of sniffling noise."

"But he is making a sniffling noise!"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"No, he's making a snuffling noise. Great difference between snuffling and sniffing. Not the same thing at all. I mean to say, when they sniff they sniff, and when they snuffle they—as it were—snuffle. That's how you can tell. If you ask *me*"—he passed his hand over the dog's back. Percy uttered another cry. "I know what's the matter with him."

"A brute of a man kicked him at rehearsal. Do you think he's injured internally?"

"It's rheumatism," said Archie. "Jolly old rheumatism. That's all that's the trouble."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely!"

"But what can I do?"

"Give him a good hot bath, and mind and dry him well. He'll have a good sleep then, and won't have any pain. Then, first thing to-morrow, you want to give him salicylate of soda."

"I'll never remember that."

"I'll write it down for you. You ought to give him from ten to twenty grains three times a day in an ounce of water. And rub him with any good embrocation."

"And he won't die?"

"Die! He'll live to be as old as you are! I mean to say——"

"I could kiss you!" said Miss Silverton, emotionally.

Archie backed hastily.

"No, no, absolutely not! Nothing like that required, really!"

"You're a darling!"

"Yes. I mean no. No, no, really!"

"I don't know what to say. What can I say?"

"Good night," said Archie.

"I wish there was something I could do! If you hadn't been here, I should have gone off my head!"

A great idea flashed across Archie's brain.

"Do you really want to do something?"

"Anything!"

"Then I do wish, like a dear sweet soul, you would pop straight back to New York to-morrow and go on with those rehearsals."

Miss Silverton shook her head.

"I can't do that!"

"Oh, right-o! But it isn't much to ask, what!"

"Not much to ask! I'll never forgive that man for kicking Percy!"

"Now listen, dear old soul. You've got the story all wrong. As a matter of fact, jolly old Benham told me himself that he has the greatest esteem and respect for Percy, and wouldn't have kicked him for the world. And, you know it was more a sort of push than a kick. You might almost call it a light shove. The fact is, it was beastly dark in the theatre, and he was legging it sideways for some reason or other, no doubt with the best motives, and unfortunately he happened to stub his toe on the poor old bean."

"Then why didn't he say so?"

"As far as I could make out, you didn't give him a chance."

Miss Silverton wavered.

"I always hate going back after I've walked out on a show," she said. "It seems so weak!"

"Not a bit of it! They'll give three hearty cheers and think you a topper. Besides, you've got to go to New York in any case. To take Percy to a vet., you know, what!"

"Of course. How right you always are!" Miss Silverton hesitated again. "Would you really be glad if I went back to the show?"

"I'd go singing about the hotel! Great pal of mine, Benham. A thoroughly cheery old bean, and very cut up about the whole affair. Besides, think of all the coves thrown out of work—the thingummabobs and the poor what-d'you-call-'ems!"

"Very well."

"You'll do it?"

"Yes."

"I say, you really are one of the best! Absolutely like mother made! That's fine! Well, I think I'll be saying good night."

"Good night. And thank you so much!"

"Oh, no, rather not!"

Archie moved to the door.

"Oh, by the way."

"Yes?"

"If I were you, I think I should catch the very first train you can get to New York. You see—er—you ought to take Percy to the vet. as soon as ever you can."

"You really do think of everything," said Miss Silverton.

"Yes," said Archie, meditatively.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SAD CASE OF LOONEY BIDDLE

ARCHIE was a simple soul, and, as is the case with most simple souls, gratitude came easily to him. He appreciated kind treatment. And when, on the following day, Lucille returned to the Hermitage, all smiles and affection, and made no further reference to Beauty's Eyes and the flies that got into them, he was conscious of a keen desire to show some solid recognition of this magnanimity. Few wives, he was aware, could have had the nobility and what not to refrain from occasionally turning the conversation in the direction of the above-mentioned topics. It had not needed this behaviour on her part to convince him that Lucille was a topper and a corker and one of the very best, for he had been cognisant of these facts since the first moment he had met her: but what he did feel was that she deserved to be rewarded in no uncertain manner. And it seemed a happy coincidence to him that her birthday should be coming along in the next week or so. Surely, felt Archie, he could whack up some sort of a not unjuicy gift for that occasion—something pretty ripe that would make a substantial hit with the dear girl. Surely something would come along to relieve his chronic impecuniosity for just sufficient length of time to enable him to spread himself on this great occasion.

And, as if in direct answer to prayer, an almost forgotten aunt in England suddenly, out of an absolutely blue sky, shot no less a sum than five hundred dollars across the ocean. The present was so lavish and unexpected that Archie had the awed feeling of one who participates in a miracle. He felt, like Herbert Parker, that the righteous was not forsaken. It was the sort of thing that restored a fellow's faith in human nature. For nearly a week he went about in a happy trance: and when, by thrift and enterprise—that is to say, by betting Reggie van Tuyl that the New York Giants would win the opening game of the series against the Pittsburg baseball team—he contrived to double his capital, what it amounted to was simply that life had nothing more to offer. He was actually in a position to go to a thousand dollars for Lucille's birthday present. He gathered in Mr. van Tuyl, of whose taste in

these matters he had a high opinion, and dragged him off to a jeweller's on Broadway.

The jeweller, a stout, comfortable man, leaned on the counter and fingered lovingly the bracelet which he had lifted out of its nest of blue plush. Archie, leaning on the other side of the counter, inspected the bracelet searchingly, wishing that he knew more about these things; for he had rather a sort of idea that the merchant was scheming to do him in the eyeball. In a chair by his side, Reggie van Tuyl, half asleep as usual, yawned despondently. He had permitted Archie to lug him into this shop; and he wanted to buy something and go. Any form of sustained concentration fatigued Reggie.

"Now this," said the jeweller, "I could do at eight hundred and fifty dollars."

"Grab it!" murmured Mr. van Tuyl.

The jeweller eyed him approvingly, a man after his own heart; but Archie looked doubtful. It was all very well for Reggie to tell him to grab it in that careless way. Reggie was a dashed millionaire, and no doubt bought bracelets by the pound or the gross or what not; but he himself was in an entirely different position.

"Eight hundred and fifty dollars!" he said, hesitating.

"Worth it," mumbled Reggie van Tuyl.

"More than worth it," amended the jeweller. "I can assure you it's better value than you could get anywhere on Fifth Avenue."

"Yes?" said Archie. He took the bracelet and twiddled it thoughtfully. "Well, my dear old jeweller, one can't say fairer than that, can one—or two, as the case may be!" He frowned. "Oh, well, all right! But it's rummy that women are so fearfully keen on these little thingummies, isn't it? I mean can't see what they see in them. Stones, and all that. Still, there it is, of course!"

"There," said the jeweller, "as you say, it is, sir."

"Yes, there it is!"

"Yes, there it is," said the jeweller, "fortunately for people in my line of business. Will you take it with you, sir?"

Archie reflected.

"No. No, not take it with me. The fact is, you know, my wife's coming back from the country to-night, and it's her birthday to-morrow, and the thing's for her, and, if it was popping about the place to-night, she might see it, and it would sort of spoil the surprise. I mean to say, she doesn't know I'm giving it her, and all that!"

"Besides," said Reggie, achieving a certain animation now that the business interview was concluded, "going to the ball-game this afternoon—might get pocket picked—yes, better have it sent."

"Where shall I send it, sir?"

"Eh? Oh, shoot it along to Mrs. Archibald Moffam, at the Cosmopolis. Not to-day, you know. Buzz it in first thing to-morrow."

Having completed the satisfactory deal, the jeweller threw off the business manner and became chatty.

"Going to the ball-game? It should be an interesting contest."

Reggie van Tuyl, now—by his own standards—completely awake, took exception to this remark.

"Not a bit of it!" he said, decidedly. "No contest! Can't call it a contest. Walk-over for the Pirates!"

Archie was stung to the quick. There is that about baseball which arouses enthusiasm and the partisan spirit in the unlikelyst bosoms. It is almost impossible for a man to live in America and not become gripped by the game; and Archie had long been one of its warmest adherents. He was a whole-hearted supporter of the Giants, and his only grievance against Reggie, in other respects an estimable young man, was that the latter, whose money had been inherited from steel-mills in that city, had an absurd regard for the Pirates of Pittsburg.

"What absolute bally rot!" he exclaimed. "Look what the Giants did to them yesterday!"

"Yesterday isn't to-day," said Reggie.

"No, it'll be a jolly sight worse," said Archie. "Looney Biddle'll be pitching for the Giants to-day."

"That's just what I mean. The Pirates have got him rattled. Look what happened last time."

Archie understood, and his generous nature chafed at the innuendo. Looney Biddle—so-called by an affectionately admiring public as the result of certain marked eccentricities—was beyond dispute the greatest left-handed pitcher New York had possessed in the last decade. But there was one blot on Mr. Biddle's otherwise stainless scutcheon. Five weeks before, on the occasion of the Giants' invasion of Pittsburg, he had gone mysteriously to pieces. Few native-born partisans, brought up to baseball from the cradle, had been plunged into a profounder gloom on that occasion than Archie; but his soul revolted at the thought that that sort of thing could ever happen again.

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"I'm not saying," continued Reggie, "that Biddle isn't a very fair pitcher, but it's cruel to send him against the Pirates, and somebody ought to stop it. His best friends should interfere. Once a team gets a pitcher rattled, he's never any good against them again. He loses his nerve."

The jeweller nodded approval of this sentiment.

"They never come back," he said, sententiously.

The fighting blood of the Moffams was now thoroughly stirred. Archie eyed his friend sternly. Reggie was a good chap—in many respects an extremely sound egg—but he must not be allowed to talk rot of this description about the greatest left-handed pitcher of the age.

"It seems to me, old companion," he said, "that a small bet is indicated at this juncture. How about it?"

"Don't want to take your money."

"You won't have to! In the cool twilight of the merry old summer evening I, friend of my youth and companion of my riper years, shall be trousering yours."

Reggie yawned. The day was very hot, and this argument was making him feel sleepy again.

"Well, just as you like, of course. Double or quits on yesterday's bet, if that suits you."

For a moment Archie hesitated. Firm as his faith was in Mr. Biddle's stout left arm, he had not intended to do the thing on quite this scale. That thousand dollars of his was earmarked for Lucille's birthday present, and he doubted whether he ought to risk it. Then the thought that the honour of New York was in his hands decided him. Besides, the risk was negligible. Betting on Looney Biddle was like betting on the probable rise of the sun in the east. The thing began to seem to Archie a rather unusually sound and conservative investment. He remembered that the jeweller, until he drew him firmly but kindly to earth and urged him to curb his exuberance and talk business on a reasonable place, had started brandishing bracelets that cost about two thousand. There would be time to pop in at the shop this evening after the game and change the one he had selected for one of those. Nothing was too good for Lucille on her birthday.

"Right-o!" he said. "Make it so, old friend!"

Archie walked back to the Cosmopolis. No misgivings came to mar his perfect contentment. He felt no qualms about separating

Reggie from another thousand dollars. Except for a little small change in the possession of the Messrs. Rockefeller and Vincent Astor, Reggie had all the money in the world and could afford to lose. He hummed a gay air as he entered and crossed to the cigar-stand to buy a few cigarettes to see him through the afternoon.

The girl behind the cigar counter welcomed him with a bright smile. Archie was popular with the employees of the Cosmopolis.

" 'S a great day, Mr. Moffam!"

"One of the brightest and best," agreed Archie. "Could you dig me out two, or possibly three, cigarettes of the usual description? I shall want something to smoke at the ball-game."

"You going to the ball-game?"

"Rather! Wouldn't miss it for a fortune."

"No?"

"Absolutely no! Not with jolly old Biddle pitching."

The cigar-stand girl laughed amusedly.

"Is he pitching this afternoon? Say, that feller's a nut? D'you know him?"

"Know him? Well, I've seen him pitch and so forth."

"I've got a girl friend who's engaged to him!"

Archie looked at her with positive respect. It would have been more dramatic, of course, if she had been engaged to the great man herself, but still the mere fact that she had a girl friend in that astounding position gave her a sort of halo.

"No, really!" he said. "I say, by Jove, really! Fancy that!"

"Yes, she's engaged to him all right. Been engaged close on a coupla months now."

"I say! That's frightfully interesting! Fearfully interesting, really!"

"It's funny about that guy," said the cigar-stand girl. "He's a nut! The fellow who said there's plenty of room at the top must have been thinking of Gus Biddle's head! He's crazy about m' girl friend, y' know, and, whenever they have a fuss, it seems like he sort of flies right off the handle."

"Goes in off the deep end, eh?"

"Yes, *sir*! Loses what little sense he's got. Why, the last time him and m'girl friend got to scrapping was when he was going off to Pittsburg to play, about a month ago. He'd been out with her the day he left for there, and he had a grouch or something, and he started making low, sneaky cracks about her Uncle Sigsbee. Well, m'girl friend's got a nice disposition, but she c'n

get mad, and she just left him flat and told him all was over. And he went off to Pittsburg, and, when he started in to pitch the opening game, he just couldn't keep his mind on his job, and look what them assassins done to him! Five runs in the first innings! Yessir, he's a nut all right!"

Archie was deeply concerned. So this was the explanation of that mysterious disaster, that weird tragedy which had puzzled the sporting press from coast to coast.

"Good God! Is he often taken like that?"

"Oh, he's all right, when he hasn't had a fuss with m' girl friend," said the cigar-stand girl, indifferently. Her interest in baseball was tepid. Women are too often like this—mere butterflies, with no concern for the deeper side of life.

"Yes, but I say! What I mean to say, you know! Are they pretty pally now? The good old Dove of Peace flapping its little wings fairly briskly and all that?"

"Oh, I guess everything's nice and smooth just now. I seen m' girl friend yesterday, and Gus was taking her to the movies last night, so I guess everything's nice and smooth."

Archie breathed a sigh of relief.

"Took her to the movies, did he? Stout fellow!"

"I was at the funniest picture last week," said the cigar-stand girl. "Honest, it was a scream! It was like this——"

Archie listened politely; then went in to get a bite of lunch. His equanimity, shaken by the discovery of the rift in the peerless one's armour, was restored. Good old Biddle had taken the girl to the movies last night. Probably he had squeezed her hand a goodish bit in the dark. With what result? Why, the fellow would be feeling like one of those chappies who used to joust for the smiles of females in the Middle Ages. What he meant to say, presumably the girl would be at the game this afternoon, whooping him on, and good old Biddle would be so full of beans and buck that there would be no holding him.

Encouraged by these thoughts, Archie lunched with an untroubled mind. Luncheon concluded, he proceeded to the lobby to buy back his hat and stick from the boy brigand with whom he had left them. It was while he was conducting this financial operation that he observed that at the cigar-stand, which adjoined the coat-and-hat alcove, his friend behind the counter had become engaged in conversation with another girl.

This was a determined-looking young woman in a blue dress

and a large hat of a bold and flowery species. Archie happening to attract her attention, she gave him a glance out of a pair of fine brown eyes, then, as if she did not think much of him, turned to her companion and resumed their conversation—which, being of an essentially private and intimate nature, she conducted, after the manner of her kind, in a ringing soprano which penetrated into every corner of the lobby. Archie, waiting while the brigand reluctantly made change for a dollar bill, was privileged to hear every word.

"Right from the start I seen he was in a ugly mood. *You* know how he gets, dearie! Chewing his upper lip and looking at you as if you were so much dirt beneath his feet! How was *I* to know he'd lost fifteen dollars fifty-five playing poker, and anyway, I don't see where he gets a licence to work off his grouches on me. And I told him so. 'Gus,' I said, 'if you can't be bright and smiling and cheerful when you take me out, why do you come round at all?' Was I wrong or right, dearie?"

The girl behind the counter heartily endorsed her conduct. Once you let a man use you as a door-mat, where were you?

"What happened then, honey?"

"Well, after that we went to the movies."

Archie started convulsively. The change from his dollar-bill leaped in his hand. Some of it sprang overboard and tinkled across the floor, with the brigand in pursuit. A monstrous suspicion had begun to take root in his mind.

"Well, we got good seats, but—well, you know how it is, once things start going wrong. You know that hat of mine, the one with the daisies and cherries and the feather—I'd taken it off and given it him to hold when we went in, and what do you think that fell'r'd done? Put in on the floor and crammed it under the seat, just to save himself the trouble of holding it on his lap! And, when I showed him I was upset, all he said was that he was a pitcher and not a hat-stand!"

Archie was paralysed. He paid no attention to the hat-check boy, who was trying to induce him to accept treasure-trove to the amount of forty-five cents. His whole being was concentrated on this frightful tragedy which had burst upon him like a tidal wave. No possible room for doubt remained. "Gus" was the only Gus in New York that mattered, and this resolute and injured female before him was the Girl Friend, in whose slim hands rested the happiness of New York's baseball followers, the

destiny of the unconscious Giants, and the fate of his thousand dollars. A strangled croak proceeded from his parched lips.

"Well, I didn't say anything at the moment. It just shows how them movies can work on a girl's feelings. It was a Bryant Washburn film, and somehow, whenever I see him on the screen, nothing else seems to matter. I just get that goo-ey feeling, and couldn't start a fight if you asked me to. So we go off to have a soda, and I said to him, 'That sure was a lovely film, Gus!' and would you believe me, he says straight out that he didn't think it was such a much, and he thought Bryant Washburn was a pill! A pill!" The Girl Friend's penetrating voice shook with emotion.

"He never!" exclaimed the shocked cigar-stand girl.

"He did, if I die the next moment! I wasn't more than half-way through my vanilla and maple, but I got up without a word and left him. And I ain't seen a sight of him since. So there you are, dearie! Was I right or wrong?"

The cigar-stand girl gave unqualified approval. What men like Gus Biddle needed for the salvation of their souls was an occasional good jolt right where it would do most good.

"I'm glad you think I acted right, dearie," said the Girl Friend. "I guess I've been too weak with Gus, and he's took advantage of it. I s'pose I'll have to forgive him one of these old days, but, believe me, it won't be for a week."

The cigar-stand girl was in favour of a fortnight.

"No," said the Girl Friend, regretfully. "I don't believe I could hold out that long. But, if I speak to him inside a week, well——! Well, I gotta be going. Good-bye, honey."

The cigar-stand girl turned to attend to an impatient customer, and the Girl Friend, walking with the firm and decisive steps which indicate character, made for the swing-door leading to the street. And as she went, the paralysis which had gripped Archie relaxed its hold. Still ignoring the forty-five cents which the hat-check boy continued to proffer, he leaped in her wake like a panther and came upon her just as she was stepping into a car. The car was full, but not too full for Archie. He dropped his five cents into the box and reached for a vacant strap. He looked down upon the flowered hat. There she was. And there he was. Archie rested his left ear against the forearm of a long, strongly-built young man in a grey suit who had followed him into the car and was sharing his strap, and pondered.

CHAPTER XV

SUMMER STORMS

OF course, in a way, the thing was simple. The wheeze was, in a sense, straightforward and uncomplicated. What he wanted to do was to point out to the injured girl all that hung on her. He wished to touch her heart, to plead with her, to desire her to restate her war-aims, and to persuade her—before three o'clock when that stricken gentleman would be stepping into the pitcher's box to loose off the first ball against the Pittsburg Pirates—to let bygones be bygones and forgive Augustus Biddle. But the blighted problem was, how the deuce to find the opportunity to start. He couldn't yell at the girl in a crowded street-car; and, if he let go of his strap and bent over her, somebody would step on his neck.

The Girl Friend, who for the first five minutes had remained entirely concealed beneath her hat, now sought diversion by looking up and examining the faces of the upper strata of passengers. Her eye caught Archie's in a glance of recognition, and he smiled feebly, endeavouring to register bonhomie and good-will. He was surprised to see a startled expression come into her brown eyes. Her face turned pink. At least, it was pink already, but it turned pinker. The next moment, the car having stopped to pick up more passengers, she jumped off and started to hurry across the street.

Archie was momentarily taken aback. When embarking on this business he had never intended it to become a blend of otter-hunting and a moving-picture chase. He followed her off the car with a sense that his grip on the affair was slipping. Pre-occupied with these thoughts, he did not perceive that the long young man who had shared his strap had alighted too. His eyes were fixed on the vanishing figure of the Girl Friend, who, having buzzed at a smart pace into Sixth Avenue, was now legging it in the direction of the staircase leading to one of the stations of the Elevated Railroad. Dashing up the stairs after her, he shortly afterwards found himself suspended as before from a strap, gazing upon the now familiar flowers on top of her hat.

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

From another strap farther down the carriage swayed the long young man in the grey suit.

The train rattled on. Once or twice, when it stopped, the girl seemed undecided whether to leave or remain. She half rose, then sank back again. Finally she walked resolutely out of the car, and Archie, following, found himself in a part of New York strange to him. The inhabitants of this district appeared to eke out a precarious existence, not by taking in one another's washing, but by selling one another second-hand clothes.

Archie glanced at his watch. He had lunched early, but so crowded with emotions had been the period following lunch that he was surprised to find that the hour was only just two. The discovery was a pleasant one. With a full hour before the scheduled start of the game, much might be achieved. He hurried after the girl, and came up with her just as she turned the corner into one of those forlorn New York side-streets which are populated chiefly by children, cats, desultory loafers, and empty meat-tins.

The girl stopped and turned. Archie smiled a winning smile. "I say, my dear sweet creature!" he said. "I say, my dear old thing, one moment!"

"Is that so?" said the Girl Friend.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Is that *so*?"

Archie began to feel certain tremors. Her eyes were gleaming, and her determined mouth had become a perfectly straight line of scarlet. It was going to be difficult to be chatty to this girl. She was going to be a hard audience. Would mere words be able to touch her heart? The thought suggested itself that, properly speaking, one would need to use a pick-axe.

"If you could spare me a couple of minutes of your valuable time——"

"Say!" The lady drew herself up menacingly. "You tie a can to yourself and disappear! Fade away, or I'll call a cop!"

Archie was horrified at this misinterpretation of his motives. One or two children, playing close at hand, and a loafer who was trying to keep the wall from falling down, seemed pleased. Theirs was a colourless existence, and to the rare purple moments which had enlivened it in the past the calling of a cop had been the unflinching preliminary. The loafer nudged a fellow-loafer, sunning himself against the same wall. The children, abandoning the meat-tin round which their game had centred, drew closer.

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"My dear old soul!" said Archie. "You don't understand!"

"Don't I! I know your sort, you trailing arbutus!"

"No, no! My dear old thing, believe me, I wouldn't dream!"

"Are you going or aren't you?"

Eleven more children joined the ring of spectators. The loafers stared silently, like awakened crocodiles.

"But, I say, listen! I only wanted—"

At this point another voice spoke.

"Say!"

The word "Say!" more almost than any word in the American language, is capable of a variety of shades of expression. It can be genial, it can be jovial, it can be appealing. It can also be truculent. The "Say!" which at this juncture smote upon Archie's ear-drum with a suddenness which made him leap in the air was truculent; and the two loafers and twenty-seven children who now formed the audience were well satisfied with the dramatic development of the performance. To their experienced ears the word had the right ring.

Archie spun round. At his elbow stood a long, strongly-built young man in a grey suit.

"Well!" said the young man, nastily. And he extended a large, freckled face towards Archie's. It seemed to the latter, as he backed against the wall, that the young man's neck must be composed of india-rubber. It appeared to be growing longer every moment. His face, besides being freckled, was a dull brick-red in colour; his lips curled back in an unpleasant snarl, showing a gold tooth; and beside him, swaying in an ominous sort of way, hung two clenched red hands about the size of two young legs of mutton. Archie eyed him with a growing apprehension. There are moments in life when, passing idly on our way, we see a strange face, look into strange eyes, and with a sudden glow of human warmth say to ourselves, "We have found a friend!" This was not one of those moments. The only person Archie had ever seen in his life who looked less friendly was the sergeant-major who had trained him in the early days of the war, before he had got his commission.

"I've had my eye on you!" said the young man.

He still had his eye on him. It was a hot, gimlet-like eye, and it pierced the recesses of Archie's soul. He backed a little farther against the wall.

Archie was frankly disturbed. He was no poltroon, and had proved the fact on many occasions during the days when the entire German army seemed to be picking on him personally, but he hated and shrank from anything in the nature of a bally public scene.

"What," enquired the young man, still bearing the burden of the conversation and shifting his left hand a little farther behind his back, "do you mean by following this young lady?"

Archie was glad he had asked him. This was precisely what he wanted to explain. "My dear old lad——" he began.

In spite of the fact that he had asked a question and presumably desired a reply, the sound of Archie's voice seemed to be more than the young man could endure. It deprived him of the last vestige of restraint. With a rasping snarl he brought his left fist round in a sweeping semicircle in the direction of Archie's head.

Archie was no novice in the art of self-defence. Since his early days at school he had learned much from leather-faced professors of the science. He had been watching this unpleasant young man's eyes with close attention, and the latter could not have indicated his scheme of action more clearly if he had sent him a formal note. Archie saw the swing all the way. He stepped nimbly aside, and the fist crashed against the wall. The young man fell back with a yelp of anguish.

"Gus!" screamed the Girl Friend, bounding forward.

She flung her arms round the injured man, who was ruefully examining a hand which, always of an out-size, was now swelling to still further dimensions.

"Gus, darling!"

A sudden chill gripped Archie. So engrossed had he been with his mission that it had never occurred to him that the love-lorn pitcher might have taken it into his head to follow the girl as well in the hope of putting in a word for himself. Yet such apparently had been the case. Well, this had definitely torn it. Two loving hearts were united again in complete reconciliation, but a fat lot of good that was. It would be days before the misguided Looney Biddle would be able to pitch with a hand like that. It looked like a ham already, and was still swelling. Probably the wrist was sprained. For at least a week the greatest left-handed pitcher of his time would be about as much use to the

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

Giants in any professional capacity as a cold in the head. And on that crippled hand depended the fate of all the money Archie had in the world. He wished now that he had not thwarted the fellow's simple enthusiasm. To have had his head knocked forcibly through a brick wall would not have been pleasant, but the ultimate outcome would not have been as unpleasant as this. With a heavy heart Archie prepared to withdraw, to be alone with his sorrow.

At this moment, however, the Girl Friend, releasing her wounded lover, made a sudden dash for him, with the plainest intention of blotting him from the earth.

"No, I say! Really!" said Archie, bounding backwards. "I mean to say!"

In a series of events, all of which had been a bit thick, this, in his opinion, achieved the maximum of thickness. It was the extreme ragged, outside edge of the limit. To brawl with a fellow-man in a public street had been bad, but to be brawled with by a girl—the shot was not on the board. Absolutely not on the board. There was only one thing to be done. It was dashed undignified, no doubt, for a fellow to pick up the old waukeesis and leg it in the face of the enemy, but there was no other course. Archie started to run; and, as he did so, one of the loafers made the mistake of gripping him by the collar of his coat.

"I got him!" observed the loafer.

There is a time for all things. This was essentially not the time for anyone of the male sex to grip the collar of Archie's coat. If a syndicate of Dempsey, Carpentier, and one of the Zoo gorillas had endeavoured to stay his progress at that moment, they would have had reason to consider it a rash move. Archie wanted to be elsewhere, and the blood of generations of Moffams, many of whom had swung a wicked axe in the free-for-all mix-ups of the Middle Ages, boiled within him at any attempt to revise his plans. There was a good deal of the loafer, but it was all soft. Releasing his hold when Archie's heel took him shrewdly on the shin, he received a nasty punch in what would have been the middle of his waistcoat if he had worn one, uttered a gurgling bleat like a wounded sheep, and collapsed against the wall. Archie, with a torn coat, rounded the corner, and sprinted down Ninth Avenue.

The suddenness of the move gave him an initial advantage.

He was half-way down the first block before the vanguard of the pursuit poured out of the side street. Continuing to travel well, he skimmed past a large dray which had pulled up across the road, and moved on. The noise of those who pursued was loud and clamorous in the rear, but the dray hid him momentarily from their sight, and it was this fact which led Archie, the old campaigner, to take his next step.

It was perfectly obvious—he was aware of this even in the novel excitement of the chase—that a chappie couldn't hoof it at twenty-five miles an hour indefinitely along a main thoroughfare of a great city without exciting remark. He must take cover. Cover! That was the wheeze. He looked about him for cover.

"You want a nice suit?"

It takes a great deal to startle your commercial New Yorker. The small tailor, standing in his doorway, seemed in no way surprised at the spectacle of Archie, whom he had seen pass at a conventional walk some five minutes before, returning like this at top speed. He assumed that Archie had suddenly remembered that he wanted to buy something.

This was exactly what Archie had done. More than anything else in the world, what he wanted to do now was to get into that shop and have a long talk about gents' clothing. Pulling himself up abruptly, he shot past the small tailor into the dim interior. A confused aroma of cheap clothing greeted him. Except for a small oasis behind a grubby counter, practically all the available space was occupied by suits. Stiff suits, looking like the body when discovered by the police, hung from hooks. Limp suits, with the appearance of having swooned from exhaustion, lay about on chairs and boxes. The place was a cloth morgue, a Sargasso Sea of serge.

Archie would not have had it otherwise. In these quiet groves of clothing a regiment could have lain hid.

"Something nifty in tweeds?" enquired the business-like proprietor of this haven, following him amiably into the shop. "Or, maybe, yes, a nice serge? Say, mister, I got a sweet thing in blue serge that'll fit you like the paper on the wall!"

Archie wanted to talk about clothes, but not yet.

"I say, laddie," he said, hurried. "Lend me your ear for half a jiffy!" Outside the baying of the pack had become imminent. "Stow me away for a moment in the undergrowth, and I'll buy anything you want."

He withdrew into the jungle. The noise outside grew in volume. The pursuit had been delayed for a priceless few instants by the arrival of another dray, moving northwards, which had drawn level with the first dray and dexterously bottled up the fairway. This obstacle had now been overcome, and the original searchers, their ranks swelled by a few dozen more of the leisured classes, were hot on the trail again.

"You done a murder?" enquired the voice of the proprietor, mildly interested, filtering through a wall of cloth. "Well, boys will be boys!" he said, philosophically. "See anything there that you like? There's some sweet things there!"

"I'm inspecting them narrowly," replied Archie. "If you don't let those chappies find me, I shouldn't be surprised if I bought one."

"One?" said the proprietor, with a touch of austerity.

"Two," said Archie, quickly. "Or possibly three or six."

The proprietor's cordiality returned.

"You can't have too many nice suits," he said, approvingly, "not a young feller like you that wants to look nice. All the nice girls like a young feller that dresses nice. When you go out of here in a suit I got hanging up there at the back, the girls'll be all over you like flies round a honey-pot."

"Would you mind," said Archie, "would you mind, as a personal favour to me, old companion, not mentioning that word 'girls'?"

He broke off. A heavy foot had crossed the threshold of the shop.

"Say, uncle," said a deep voice, one of those beastly voices that only the most poisonous blighters have, "you seen a young feller run past here?"

"Young feller?" The proprietor appeared to reflect. "Do you mean a young feller in blue, with a Homburg hat?"

"That's the duck! We lost him. Where did he go?"

"Him! Why, he come running past, quick as he could go. I wondered what he was running for, a hot day like this. He went round the corner at the bottom of the block."

There was a silence.

"Well, I guess he's got away," said the voice, regretfully.

"The way he was travelling," agreed the proprietor, "I wouldn't be surprised if he was in Europe by this. You want a nice suit?"

The other, curtly expressing a wish that the proprietor would go to eternal perdition and take his entire stock with him, stumped out.

"This," said the proprietor, tranquilly, burrowing his way to where Archie stood and exhibiting a saffron-coloured outrage, which appeared to be a poor relation of the flannel family, "would put you back fifty dollars. And cheap!"

"Fifty dollars!"

"Sixty, I said. I don't speak always distinct."

Archie regarded the distressing garment with a shuddering horror. A young man with an educated taste in clothes, it got right in among his nerve centres.

"But, honestly, old soul, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but that isn't a suit, it's just a regrettable incident!"

The proprietor turned to the door in a listening attitude.

"I believe I hear that feller coming back," he said.

Archie gulped.

"How about trying it on?" he said. "I'm not sure, after all, it isn't fairly ripe."

"That's the way to talk," said the proprietor, cordially. "You try it on. You can't judge a suit, not a real nice suit like this, by looking at it. You want to put it on. There!" He led the way to a dusty mirror at the back of the shop. "Isn't that a bargain at seventy dollars? . . . Why, say, your mother would be proud if she could see her boy now!"

A quarter of an hour later, the proprietor, lovingly kneading a little sheaf of currency bills, eyed with a fond look the heap of clothes which lay on the counter.

"As nice a little lot as I've ever had in my shop!" Archie did not deny this. It was, he thought, probably only too true.

"I only wish I could see you walking up Fifth Avenue in them!" rhapsodised the proprietor. "You'll give 'em a treat! What you going to do with 'em? Carry 'em under your arm?" Archie shuddered strongly. "Well, then, I can send 'em for you anywhere you like. It's all the same to me. Where'll I send 'em?"

Archie meditated. The future was black enough as it was. He shrank from the prospect of being confronted next day, at the height of his misery, with these appalling reach-me-downs.

An idea struck him.

"Yes, send 'em," he said.

"What's the name and address?"

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"Daniel Brewster," said Archie, "Hotel Cosmopolis."

It was a long time since he had given his father-in-law a present.

Archie went out into the street, and began to walk pensively down a now peaceful Ninth Avenue. Out of the depths that covered him, black as the pit from pole to pole, no single ray of hope came to cheer him. He could not, like the poet, thank whatever gods there be for his unconquerable soul, for his soul was licked to a splinter. He felt alone and friendless in a rotten world. With the best intentions, he had succeeded only in landing himself squarely amongst the ribstons. Why had he not been content with his wealth, instead of risking it on that blighted bet with Reggie? Why had he trailed the Girl Friend, dash her! He might have known that he would only make an ass of himself. And, because he had done so, Looney Biddle's left hand, that priceless left hand before which opposing batters quailed and wilted, was out of action, resting in a sling, careened like a damaged battleship; and any chance the Giants might have had of beating the Pirates was gone—gone—as surely as that thousand dollars which should have bought a birthday present for Lucille.

A birthday present for Lucille! He groaned in bitterness of spirit. She would be coming back to-night, dear girl, all smiles and happiness, wondering what he was going to give her to-morrow. And when to-morrow dawned, all he would be able to give her would be a kind smile. A nice state of things! A jolly situation! A thoroughly good egg, he did *not* think!

It seemed to Archie that Nature, contrary to her usual custom of indifference to human suffering, was mourning with him. The sky was overcast, and the sun had ceased to shine. There was a sort of sombreness in the afternoon which fitted in with his mood. And then something splashed on his face.

It says much for Archie's pre-occupation that his first thought, as, after a few scattered drops, as though the clouds were submitting samples for approval, the whole sky suddenly began to stream like a shower-bath, was that this was simply an additional infliction which he was called upon to bear. On top of all his other troubles he would get soaked to the skin or have to hang about in some doorway. He cursed richly, and sped for shelter.

The rain was setting about its work in earnest. The world was full of that rending, swishing sound which accompanies the more

violent summer storms. Thunder crashed, and lightning flicked out of the grey heavens. Out in the street the raindrops bounded up off the stones like fairy fountains. Archie surveyed them morosely from his refuge in the entrance of a shop.

And then, suddenly, like one of those flashes which were lighting up the gloomy sky, a thought lit up his mind.

"By Jove! If this keeps up, there won't be a ball-game to-day!"

With trembling fingers he pulled out his watch. The hands pointed to five minutes to three. A blessed vision came to him of a moist and disappointed crowd receiving rain-checks up at the Polo Grounds.

"Switch it on, you blighters!" he cried, addressing the leaden clouds. "Switch it on more and more!"

It was shortly before five o'clock that a young man bounded into a jeweller's shop near the Hotel Cosmopolis—a young man who, in spite of the fact that his coat was torn near the collar and that he oozed water from every inch of his drenched clothes, appeared in the highest spirits. It was only when he spoke that the jeweller recognised in the human sponge the immaculate youth who had looked in that morning to order a bracelet.

"I say, old lad," said this young man, "you remember that jolly little what-not you showed me before lunch?"

"The bracelet, sir?"

"As you observe with a manly candour which does you credit, my dear old jeweller, the bracelet. Well, produce, exhibit, and bring it forth, would you mind? Trot it out! Slip it across on a lordly dish!"

"You wished me, surely, to put it aside and send it to the Cosmopolis to-morrow?"

The young man tapped the jeweller earnestly on his substantial chest.

"What I wished and what I wish now are two bally separate and dashed distinct things, friend of my college days! Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day, and all that! I'm not taking any more chances. Not for me! For others, yes, but not for Archibald! Here are the doubloons, produce the jolly bracelet. Thanks!"

The jeweller counted the notes with the same unction which Archie had observed earlier in the day in the proprietor of the second-hand clothes-shop. The process made him genial.

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

"A nasty wet day, sir, it's been," he observed, chattily.

Archie shook his head.

"Old friend," he said, "you're all wrong. Far otherwise, and not a bit like it, my dear old trafficker in gems! You've put your finger on the one aspect of this blighted p.m. that really deserves credit and respect. Rarely in the experience of a lifetime have I encountered a day so absolutely bally in nearly every shape and form, but there was one thing that saved it, and that was its merry old wetness! Toodle-oo, laddie!"

"Good evening, sir," said the jeweller.

CHAPTER XVI

ARCHIE ACCEPTS A SITUATION

LUCILLE moved her wrist slowly round, the better to examine the new bracelet.

"You really are an angel, angel!" she murmured.

"Like it?" said Archie complacently.

"*Like* it! Why, it's gorgeous! It must have cost a fortune."

"Oh, nothing to speak of. Just a few hard-earned pieces of eight. Just a few doubloons from the old oak chest."

"I didn't know there were any doubloons in the old oak chest."

"Well, as a matter of fact," admitted Archie, "at one point in the proceedings there weren't. But an aunt of mine in England—peace be on her head!—happened to send me a chunk of the necessary at what you might call the psychological moment."

"And you spent it all on a birthday present for me! Archie!" Lucille gazed at her husband adoringly. "Archie, do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"You're the perfect man!"

"No, really! What ho!"

"Yes," said Lucille firmly. "I've long suspected it, and now I know. I don't think there's anybody like you in the world."

Archie patted her hand.

"It's a rummy thing," he observed, "but your father said almost exactly that to me only yesterday. Only I don't fancy he meant the same as you. To be absolutely frank, his exact expression was that he thanked God there was only one of me."

A troubled look came into Lucille's grey eyes.

"It's a shame about father. I do wish he appreciated you. But you mustn't be too hard on him."

"Me?" said Archie. "Hard on your father? Well, dash it all, I don't think I treat him with what you might call actual brutality, what! I mean to say, my whole idea is rather to keep out of the old lad's way and curl up in a ball if I can't dodge him. I'd just as soon be hard on a stampeding elephant! I wouldn't for the world say anything derogatory, as it were, to your jolly old pater, but there is no getting away from the fact that he's by way of being

one of our leading man-eating fishes. It would be idle to deny that he considers that you let down the proud old name of Brewster a bit when you brought me in and laid me on the mat."

"Any one would be lucky to get you for a son-in-law, precious."

"I fear me, light of my life, the dad doesn't see eye to eye with you on that point. No, every time I get hold of a daisy, I give him another chance, but it always works out at 'He loves me not!'"

"You must make allowances for him, darling."

"Right-o! But I hope devoutly that he doesn't catch me at it. I've a sort of idea that if the old dad discovered that I was making allowances for him, he would have from ten to fifteen fits."

"He's worried just now, you know."

"I didn't know. He doesn't confide in me much."

"He's worried about that waiter."

"What waiter, queen of my soul?"

"A man called Salvatore. Father dismissed him some time ago."

"Salvatore!"

"Probably you don't remember him. He used to wait on this table."

"Why——"

"And father dismissed him, apparently, and now there's all sorts of trouble. You see, father wants to build this new hotel of his, and he thought he'd get the site and everything and could start building right away: and now he finds this man Salvatore's mother owns a little newspaper and tobacco shop right in the middle of the site, and there's no way of getting him out without buying the shop, and he won't sell. At least, he's made his mother promise that she won't sell."

"A boy's best friend is his mother," said Archie approvingly.

"I had a sort of idea all along——"

"So father's in despair."

Archie drew at his cigarette meditatively.

"I remember a chappie—a policeman he was, as a matter of fact, and incidentally a fairly pronounced blighter—remarking to me some time ago that you could trample on the poor man's face but you mustn't be surprised if he bit you in the leg while you were doing it. Apparently this is what has happened to the old dad. I had a sort of idea all along that old friend Salvatore would come out strong in the end if you only gave him time. Brainy sort of feller! Great pal of mine."

Lucille's small face lightened. She gazed at Archie with proud

affection. She felt that she ought to have known that he was the one to solve this difficulty.

"You're wonderful, darling! Is he really a friend of yours?"

"Absolutely. Many's the time he and I have chatted in this very grill-room."

"Then it's all right. If you went to him and argued with him, he would agree to sell the shop, and father would be happy. Think how grateful father would be to you! It would make all the difference."

Archie turned this over in his mind.

"Something in that," he agreed.

"It would make him see what a pet lambkin you really are!"

"Well," said Archie, "I'm bound to say that any scheme which what you might call culminates in your father regarding me as a pet lambkin ought to receive one's best attention. How much did he offer Salvatore for his shop?"

"I don't know. There is father. Call him over and ask him."

Archie glanced over to where Mr. Brewster had sunk moodily into a chair at a neighbouring table. It was plain even at that distance that Daniel Brewster had his troubles and was bearing them with an ill grace. He was scowling absently at the tablecloth.

"You call him," said Archie, having inspected his formidable relative. "You know him better."

"Let's go over to him."

They crossed the room. Lucille sat down opposite her father. Archie draped himself over a chair in the background.

"Father, dear," said Lucille. "Archie has got an idea."

"Archie?" said Mr. Brewster incredulously.

"This is me," said Archie, indicating himself with a spoon. "The tall, distinguished-looking bird."

"What new fool-thing is he up to now?"

"It's a splendid idea, father. He wants to help you over your new hotel."

"Wants to run it for me, I suppose?"

"By Jove!" said Archie, reflectively. "That's not a bad scheme! I never thought of running an hotel. I shouldn't mind taking a stab at it."

"He has thought of a way of getting rid of Salvatore and his shop."

For the first time Mr. Brewster's interest in the conversation seemed to stir. He looked sharply at his son-in-law.

"He has, has he?" he said.

Archie balanced a roll on a fork and inserted a plate underneath. The roll bounded away into a corner.

"Sorry!" said Archie. "My fault, absolutely! I owe you a roll. I'll sign a bill for it. Oh, about this sportsman Salvatore. Well, it's like this, you know. He and I are great pals. I've known him for years and years. At least, it seems like years and years. Lu was suggesting that I seek him out in his lair and ensnare him with my diplomatic manner and superior brain power and what not."

"It was your idea, precious," said Lucille.

Mr. Brewster was silent. Much as it went against the grain to have to admit it, there seemed to be something in this.

"What do you propose to do?"

"Become a jolly old ambassador. How much did you offer the chappie?"

"Three thousand dollars. Twice as much as the place is worth. He's holding out on me for revenge."

"Ah, but how did you offer it to him, what? I mean to say, I bet you got your lawyer to write him a letter full of whereases, peradventures, and parties of the first part, and so forth. No good, old companion!"

"Don't call me old companion!"

"All wrong, laddie! Nothing like it, dear heart! No good at all, friend of my youth! Take it from your Uncle Archibald! I'm a student of human nature, and I know a thing or two."

"That's not much," growled Mr. Brewster, who was finding his son-in-law's superior manner a little trying.

"Now, don't interrupt, father," said Lucille, severely. "Can't you see Archie is going to be tremendously clever in a minute?"

"He's got to show me!"

"What you ought to do," said Archie, "is to let me go and see him, taking the stuff in crackling bills. I'll roll them about on the table in front of him. That'll fetch him!" He prodded Mr. Brewster encouragingly with a roll. "I'll tell you what to do. Give me three thousand of the best and crispest, and I'll undertake to buy that shop. It can't fail, laddie!"

"Don't call me laddie!" Mr. Brewster pondered. "Very well," he said at last. "I didn't know you had so much sense," he added grudgingly.

"Oh, positively!" said Archie. "Beneath a rugged exterior I

hide a brain like a buzz-saw. Sense? I exude it, laddie; I drip with it."

There were moments during the ensuing days when Mr. Brewster permitted himself to hope; but more frequent were the moments when he told himself that a pronounced chump like his son-in-law could not fail somehow to make a mess of the negotiations. His relief, therefore, when Archie curveted into his private room and announced that he had succeeded was great.

"You really managed to make that wop sell out?"

Archie brushed some papers off the desk with a careless gesture, and seated himself on the vacant spot.

"Absolutely! I spoke to him as one old friend to another, sprayed the bills all over the place; and he sang a few bars from 'Rigoletto,' and signed on the dotted line."

"You're not such a fool as you look," owned Mr. Brewster.

Archie scratched a match on the desk and lit a cigarette.

"It's a jolly little shop," he said. "I took quite a fancy to it. Full of newspapers, don't you know, and cheap novels, and some weird-looking sort of chocolates, and cigars with the most fearfully attractive labels. I think I'll make a success of it. It's bang in the middle of a dashed good neighbourhood. One of these days somebody will be building a big hotel round about there, and that'll help trade a lot. I look forward to ending my days on the other side of the counter with a full set of white whiskers and a skull-cap, beloved by everybody. Everybody'll say, 'Oh, you *must* patronise that quaint, delightful old blighter! He's quite a character.'"

Mr. Brewster's air of grim satisfaction had given way to a look of discomfort, almost of alarm. He presumed his son-in-law was merely indulging in *badinage*; but even so, his words were not soothing.

"Well, I'm much obliged," he said. "That infernal shop was holding up everything. Now I can start building right away."

Archie raised his eyebrows.

"But, my dear old top, I'm sorry to spoil your day-dreams and stop you chasing rainbows, and all that, but aren't you forgetting that the shop belongs to me? I don't at all know that I want to sell, either!"

"I gave you the money to buy that shop!"

"And dashed generous of you it was, too!" admitted Archie,

unreservedly. "It was the first money you ever gave me, and I shall always tell interviewers that it was you who founded my fortunes. Some day, when I'm the Newspaper-and-Tobacco-Shop King, I'll tell the world all about it in my autobiography."

Mr. Brewster rose dangerously from his seat.

"Do you think you can hold me up, you—you worm?"

"Well," said Archie, "the way I look at it is this. Ever since we met, you've been after me to become one of the world's workers, and earn a living for myself, and what not; and now I see a way to repay you for your confidence and encouragement. You'll look me up sometimes at the good old shop, won't you?" He slid off the table and moved towards the door. "There won't be any formalities where you are concerned. You can sign bills for any reasonable amount any time you want a cigar or a stick of chocolate. Well, toodle-oo!"

"Stop!"

"Now what?"

"How much do you want for that damned shop?"

"I don't want money. I want a job. If you are going to take my life-work away you ought to give me something else to do."

"What job?"

"You suggested it yourself the other day. I want to manage your new hotel."

"Don't be a fool! What do you know about managing an hotel?"

"Nothing. It will be your pleasing task to teach me the business while the shanty is being run up."

There was a pause, while Mr. Brewster chewed three inches off a pen-holder.

"Very well," he said at last.

"Topping!" said Archie. "I knew you'd see it. I'll study your methods, what! Adding some of my own, of course. You know, I've thought of one improvement on the Cosmopolis already."

"Improvement on the Cosmopolis!" cried Mr. Brewster, gashed in his finest feelings.

"Yes. There's one point where the old Cosmop slips up badly, and I'm going to see that it's corrected at my little shack. Customers will be entreated to leave their boots outside their doors at night, and they'll find them cleaned in the morning. Well, pip, pip! I must be popping. Time is money, you know, with us business men."

CHAPTER XVII

BROTHER BILL'S ROMANCE

"HER eyes," said Bill Brewster, "are like—like—what's the word I want?"

He looked across at Lucille and Archie. Lucille was leaning forward with an eager and interested face; Archie was leaning back with his finger-tips together and his eyes closed. This was not the first time since their meeting in Beale's Auction Rooms that his brother-in-law had touched on the subject of the girl he had become engaged to marry during his trip to England. Indeed, Brother Bill had touched on very little else: and Archie, though of a sympathetic nature and fond of his young relative, was beginning to feel that he had heard all he wished to hear about Mabel Winchester. Lucille, on the other hand, was absorbed. Her brother's recital had thrilled her.

"Like——" said Bill. "Like——"

"Stars?" suggested Lucille.

"Stars," said Bill gratefully. "Exactly the word. Twin stars shining in a clear sky on a summer night. Her teeth are like—what shall I say?"

"Pearls?"

"Pearls. And her hair is a lovely brown, like leaves in autumn. In fact," concluded Bill, slipping down from the heights with something of a jerk, "she's a corker. Isn't she, Archie?"

Archie opened his eyes.

"Quite right, old top!" he said. "It was the only thing to do."

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Bill coldly. He had been suspicious all along of Archie's statement that he could listen better with his eyes shut.

"Eh? Oh, sorry! Thinking of something else."

"You were asleep."

"No, no, positively and distinctly not. Frightfully interested and rapt and all that, only I didn't quite get what you said."

"I said that Mabel was a corker."

"Oh, absolutely in every respect."

"There!" Bill turned to Lucille triumphantly. "You hear

that? And Archie has only seen her photograph. Wait till he sees her in the flesh."

"My dear old chap!" said Archie, shocked. "Ladies present! I mean to say, what!"

"I'm afraid that father will be the one you'll find it hard to convince."

"Yes," admitted her brother gloomily.

"Your Mabel sounds perfectly charming, but—well, you know what father is. It is a pity she sings in the chorus."

"She hasn't much of a voice," argued Bill in extenuation.

"All the same——"

Archie, the conversation having reached a topic on which he considered himself one of the greatest living authorities—to wit, the unlovable disposition of his father-in-law—addressed the meeting as one who has a right to be heard.

"Lucille's absolutely right, old thing. Absolutely correct-o! Your esteemed progenitor is a pretty tough nut, and it's no good trying to get away from it. And I'm sorry to have to say it, old bird, but, if you come bounding in with part of the personnel of the *ensemble* on your arm and try to dig a father's blessing out of him, he's extremely apt to stab you in the gizzard."

"I wish," said Bill, annoyed, "you wouldn't talk as though Mabel were the ordinary kind of chorus-girl. She's only on the stage because her mother's hard-up and she wants to educate her little brother."

"I say," said Archie, concerned. "Take my tip, old top. In chatting the matter over with the pater, don't dwell too much on that aspect of the affair. I've been watching him closely, and it's about all he can stick, having to support *me*. If you ring in a mother and a little brother on him, he'll crack under the strain."

"Well, I've got to do something about it. Mabel will be over here in a week."

"Great Scot! You never told us that."

"Yes. She's going to be in the new Billington show. And, naturally, she will expect to meet my family. I've told her all about you."

"Did you explain father to her?" asked Lucille.

"Well, I just said she mustn't mind him, as his bark was worse than his bite."

"Well," said Archie, thoughtfully, "he hasn't bitten me yet,

so you may be right. But you've got to admit that he's a bit of a barker."

Lucille considered.

"Really, Bill, I think your best plan would be to go straight to father and tell him the whole thing. You don't want him to hear about it in a roundabout way."

"The trouble is that, whenever I'm with father, I can't think of anything to say."

Archie found himself envying his father-in-law this merciful dispensation of Providence; for, where he himself was concerned, there had been no lack of eloquence on Bill's part. In the brief period in which he had known him, Bill had talked all the time and always on the one topic. As unpromising a subject as the tariff laws was easily diverted by him into a discussion of the absent Mabel.

"When I'm with father," said Bill, "I sort of lose my nerve, and yammer."

"Dashed awkward," said Archie, politely. He sat up. "I say! By Jove! I know what you want, old friend! Just thought of it!"

"That busy brain is never still," explained Lucille.

"Saw it in the paper this morning. An advertisement of a book, don't you know?"

"I've no time for reading."

"You've time for reading this one, laddie, for you can't afford to miss it. It's a what-d'you-call-it book. What I mean to say is, if you read it and take its tips to heart, it guarantees to make you a convincing talker. The advertisement says so. The advertisement's all about a chappie whose name I forget, whom everybody loved because he talked so well. And, mark you, before he got hold of this book—*The Personality That Wins* was the name of it, if I remember rightly—he was known to all the lads in the office as Silent Samuel or something. Or it may have been Tongue-Tied Thomas. Well, one day he happened by good luck to blow in the necessary for the good old P. that W.'s, and now, whenever they want some one to go and talk Rockefeller or someone into lending them a million or so, they send for Samuel. Only now they call him Sammy the Spell-Binder and fawn upon him pretty copiously and all that. How about it, old son? How do we go?"

"What perfect nonsense," said Lucille.

"I don't know," said Bill, plainly impressed. "There might be something in it."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I remembered it said, 'Talk convincingly, and no man will ever treat you with cold, unresponsive indifference.' Well, cold, unresponsive indifference is just what you don't want the pater to treat you with, isn't it, or is it, or isn't it, what? I mean, what?"

"It sounds all right," said Bill.

"It *is* all right," said Archie. "It's a scheme! I'll go farther. It's an egg!"

"The idea I had," said Bill, "was to see if I couldn't get Mabel a job in some straight comedy. That would take the curse off the thing a bit. Then I wouldn't have to dwell on the chorus end of the business, you see."

"Much more sensible," said Lucille.

"But what a deuce of a sweat," argued Archie. "I mean to say, having to pop round and nose about and all that."

"Aren't you willing to take a little trouble for your stricken brother-in-law, worm?" said Lucille severely.

"Oh, absolutely! My idea was to get this book and coach the dear old chap. Rehearse him, don't you know. He could bone up the early chapters a bit and then drift round and try his convincing talk on me."

"It might be a good idea," said Bill reflectively.

"Well, I'll tell you what *I'm* going to do," said Lucille. "I'm going to get Bill to introduce me to his Mabel, and, if she's as nice as he says she is, *I'll* go to father and talk convincingly to him."

"You're an ace!" said Bill.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie cordially. "*My* partner, what! All the same, we ought to keep the book as a second string, you know. I mean to say, you are a young and delicately nurtured girl—full of sensibility and shrinking what's-its-name and all that—and you know what the jolly old pater is. He might bark at you and put you out of action in the first round. Well, then, if anything like that happened, don't you see, we could unleash old Bill, the trained silver-tongued expert, and let him have a shot. Personally, I'm all for the P. that W's."

"Me, too," said Bill.

Lucille looked at her watch.

"Good gracious! It's nearly one o'clock!"

"No!" Archie heaved himself up from his chair. "Well, it's a shame to break up this feast of reason and flow of soul and all

that, but, if we don't leg it with some speed, we shall be late."

"We're lunching at the Nicholson's!" explained Lucille to her brother. "I wish you were coming too."

"Lunch!" Bill shook his head with a kind of tolerant scorn. "Lunch means nothing to me these days. I've other things to think of besides food." He looked as spiritual as his rugged features would permit. "I haven't written to Her yet to-day."

"But, dash it, old scream, if she's going to be over here in a week, what's the good of writing? The letter would cross her."

"I'm not mailing my letters to England," said Bill "I'm keeping them for her to read when she arrives."

"My sainted aunt!" said Archie.

Devotion like this was something beyond his outlook.

THE SAUSAGE CHAPPIE

THE *Personality That Wins* cost Archie two dollars in cash and a lot of embarrassment when he asked for it at the store. To buy a treatise of that name would automatically seem to argue that you haven't a winning personality already, and Archie was at some pains to explain to the girl behind the counter that he wanted it for a friend. The girl seemed more interested in his English accent than in his explanation, and Archie was uncomfortably aware, as he receded, that she was practising it in an undertone for the benefit of her colleagues and fellow-workers. However, what is a little discomfort, if endured in friendship's name?

He was proceeding up Broadway after leaving the store when he encountered Reggie van Tuyl, who was drifting along in somnambulist fashion near Thirty-Ninth Street.

"Hullo, Reggie old thing!" said Archie.

"Hullo!" said Reggie, a man of few words.

"I've just been buying a book for Bill Brewster," went on Archie. "It appears that old Bill—— What's the matter?"

He broke off his recital abruptly. A sort of spasm had passed across his companion's features. The hand holding Archie's arm had tightened convulsively. One would have said that Reginald had received a shock.

"It's nothing," said Reggie. "I'm all right now. I caught sight of that fellow's clothes rather suddenly. They shook me a bit. I'm all right now," he said, bravely.

Archie, following his friend's gaze, understood. Reggie van Tuyl was never at his strongest in the morning, and he had a sensitive eye for clothes. He had been known to resign from clubs because members exceeded the bounds in the matter of soft shirts with dinner-jackets. And the short, thick-set man who was standing just in front of them in attitude of restful immobility was certainly no dandy. His best friend could not have called him dapper. Take him for all in all and on the hoof, he might have been posing as a model for a sketch of *What the Well-Dressed Man Should Not Wear*.

In costume, as in most other things, it is best to take a definite line and stick to it. This man had obviously vacillated. His neck was swathed in a green scarf; he wore an evening-dress coat; and his lower limbs were draped in a pair of tweed trousers built for a larger man. To the north he was bounded by a straw hat, to the south by brown shoes.

Archie surveyed the man's back carefully.

"Bit thick!" he said, sympathetically. "But of course Broadway isn't Fifth Avenue. What I mean to say is, Bohemian licence and what not. Broadway's crammed with deuced brainy devils who don't care how they look. Probably this bird is a master-mind of some species."

"All the same, man's no right to wear evening-dress coat with tweed trousers."

"Absolutely not! I see what you mean."

At this point the sartorial offender turned. Seen from the front, he was even more unnerving. He appeared to possess no shirt, though this defect was offset by the fact that the tweed trousers fitted snugly under the arms. He was not a handsome man. At his best he could never have been that, and in the recent past he had managed to acquire a scar that ran from the corner of his mouth half-way across his cheek. Even when his face was in repose he had an odd expression; and when, as he chanced to do now, he smiled, odd became a mild adjective, quite inadequate for purposes of description. It was not an unpleasant face, however. Unquestionably genial, indeed. There was something in it that had a quality of humorous appeal.

Archie started. He stared at the man. Memory stirred.

"Great Scot!" he cried. "It's the Sausage Chappie!"

Reginald van Tuyl gave a little moan. He was not used to this sort of thing. A sensitive young man as regarded scenes, Archie's behaviour unmanned him. For Archie, releasing his arm, had bounded forward and was shaking the other's hand warmly.

"Well, well, well! My dear old chap! You must remember me, what? No? Yes?"

The man with the scar seemed puzzled. He shuffled the brown shoes, patted the straw hat, and eyed Archie questioningly.

"I don't seem to place you," he said.

Archie slapped the back of the evening-dress coat. He linked his arm affectionately with that of the dress-reformer.

"We met outside St. Mihiel in the war. You gave me a bit of

sausage. One of the most sporting events in history. Nobody but a real sportsman would have parted with a bit of sausage at that moment to a stranger. Never forgotten it, by Jove. Saved my life, absolutely! Hadn't chewed a morsel for eight hours. Well, have you got anything on? I mean to say, you aren't booked for lunch or any rot of that species, are you? Fine! Then I move we all toddle off and get a bite somewhere." He squeezed the other's arm fondly. "Fancy meeting you again like this! I've often wondered what became of you. But, by Jove, I was forgetting. Dashed rude of me. My friend, Mr. van Tuyl."

Reggie gulped. The longer he looked at it, the harder this man's costume was to bear. His eye passed shudderingly from the brown shoes to the tweed trousers, to the green scarf, from the green scarf to the straw hat.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "Just remembered. Important date. Late already. Er—see you some time——"

He melted away, a broken man. Archie was not sorry to see him go. Reggie was a good chap, but he would undoubtedly have been *de trop* at this reunion.

"I vote we go to the Cosmopolis," he said, steering his newly-found friend through the crowd. "The browsing and sluicing isn't bad there, and I can sign the bill, which is no small consideration nowadays."

The Sausage Chappie chuckled amusedly.

"I can't go to a place like the Cosmopolis looking like this."

Archie was a little embarrassed.

"Oh, I don't know, you know, don't you know!" he said. "Still, since you have brought the topic up, you *did* get the good old wardrobe a bit mixed this morning, what? I mean to say, you seem absent-mindedly, as it were, to have got hold of samples from a good number of your various suitings."

"Suitings? How do you mean, suitings? I haven't any suitings! Who do you think I am? Vincent Astor? All I have is what I stand up in."

Archie was shocked. This tragedy touched him. He himself had never had any money in his life, but somehow he had always seemed to manage to have plenty of clothes. How this was he could not say. He had always had a vague sort of idea that tailors were kindly birds who never failed to have a pair of trousers or something up their sleeve to present to the deserving. There was the drawback, of course, that once they had given you the things

they were apt to write you rather a lot of letters about it; but you soon managed to recognise their handwriting, and then it was a simple task to extract their communications from your morning mail and drop them in the waste-paper basket. This was the first case he had encountered of a man who was really short of clothes.

"My dear old lad," he said, briskly, "this must be remedied! Oh, positively! This must be remedied at once! I suppose my things wouldn't fit you? No. Well, I tell you what. We'll wangle something from my father-in-law. Old Brewster, you know, the fellow who runs the Cosmopolis. His'll fit you like the paper on the wall, because he's a tubby little blighter, too. What I mean to say is, he's also one of those sturdy, square, fine-looking chappies of about the middle height. By the way, where are you stopping these days?"

"Nowhere just at present. I thought of taking one of those self-contained Park benches."

"Are you broke?"

"Am I!"

Archie was concerned.

"You ought to get a job."

"I ought. But somehow I don't seem able to."

"What did you do before the war?"

"I've forgotten."

"Forgotten!"

"Forgotten."

"How do you mean—forgotten? You can't mean—*forgotten*?"

"Yes. It's quite gone."

"But I mean to say. You can't have forgotten a thing like that."

"Can't I! I've forgotten all sorts of things. Where I was born. How old I am. Whether I'm married or single. What my name is——"

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Archie, staggered. "But you remembered about giving me a bit of sausage outside St. Mihiel?"

"No, I didn't. I'm taking your word for it. For all I know you may be luring me into some den to rob me of my straw hat. I don't know you from Adam. But I like your conversation—especially the part about eating—and I'm taking a chance."

Archie was concerned.

"Listen, old bean. Make an effort. You must remember that sausage episode? It was just outside St. Mihiel, about five in the evening. Your little lot were lying next to my little lot, and we

happened to meet, and I said, 'What ho!' and you said, 'Halloa!' and I said 'What ho! What ho!' and you said 'Have a bit of sausage?' and I said 'What ho! What ho! What *ho!*' "

"The dialogue seems to have been darned sparkling, but I don't remember it. It must have been after that that I stopped one. I don't seem to have caught up with myself since I got hit."

"Oh! That's how you got that scar?"

"No. I got that jumping through a plate-glass window in London on Armistice night."

"What on earth did you do that for?"

"Oh, I don't know. It seemed a good idea at the time."

"But if you can remember a thing like that, why can't you remember your name?"

"I remember everything that happened after I came out of hospital. It's the part before that's gone."

Archie patted him on the shoulder.

"I know just what you want. You need a bit of quiet and repose, to think things over and so forth. You mustn't go sleeping on Park benches. Won't do at all. Not a bit like it. You must shift to the Cosmopolis. It isn't half a bad spot, the old Cosmop. I didn't like it much the first night I was there, because there was a dashed tap that went drip-drip-drip all night and kept me awake, but the place has its points."

"Is the Cosmopolis giving free board and lodging these days?"

"Rather! That'll be all right. Well, this is the spot. We'll start by trickling up to the old boy's suite and looking over his reach-me-downs. I know the waiter on his floor. A very sound chappie. He'll let us in with his pass-key."

And so it came about that Mr. Daniel Brewster, returning to his suite in the middle of lunch in order to find a paper dealing with the subject he was discussing with his guest, the architect of his new hotel, was aware of a murmur of voices behind the closed door of his bedroom. Recognising the accents of his son-in-law, he breathed an oath and charged in. He objected to Archie wandering at large about his suite.

The sight that met his eyes when he opened the door did nothing to soothe him. The floor was a sea of clothes. There were coats on the chairs, trousers on the bed, shirts on the bookshelf. And in the middle of this welter stood Archie, with a man who, to Mr. Brewster's heated eye, looked like a tramp comedian out of a burlesque show.

"Great Godfrey!" ejaculated Mr. Brewster.

Archie looked up with a friendly smile.

"Oh, halloa-halloa!" he said, affably. "We were just glancing through your spare scenery to see if we couldn't find something for my pal here. This is Mr. Brewster, my father-in-law, old man."

Archie scanned his relative's twisted features. Something in his expression seemed not altogether encouraging. He decided that the negotiations had better be conducted in private. "One moment, old lad," he said to his new friend. "I just want to have a little talk with my father-in-law in the other room. Just a little friendly business chat. You stay here."

In the other room Mr. Brewster turned on Archie like a wounded lion of the desert.

"What the——!"

Archie secured one of his coat-buttons and began to massage it affectionately.

"Ought to have explained!" said Archie, "only didn't want to interrupt your lunch. The sportsman on the horizon is a dear old pal of mine——"

Mr. Brewster wrenched himself free.

"What the devil do you mean, you worm, by bringing tramps into my bedroom and messing about with my clothes?"

"That's just what I'm trying to explain, if you'll only listen. This bird is a bird I met in France during the war. He gave me a bit of sausage outside St. Mihiel——"

"Damn you and him and the sausage!"

"Absolutely. But listen. He can't remember who he is or where he was born or what his name is, and he's broke; so, dash it, I must look after him. You see, he gave me a bit of sausage."

Mr. Brewster's frenzy gave way to an ominous calm.

"I'll give him two seconds to clear out of here. If he isn't gone by then I'll have him thrown out."

Archie was shocked. "You don't mean that?"

"I do mean that."

"But where's he to go?"

"Outside."

"But you don't understand. This chappie has lost his memory because he was wounded in the war. Keep that fact firmly fixed in the old bean. He fought for you. Fought and bled for you. Bled profusely, by Jove. *And* he saved my life!"

"If I'd got nothing else against him, that would be enough."

"But you can't sling a chappie out into the cold hard world who bled in gallons to make the world safe for the Hotel Cosmopolis."

Mr. Brewster looked ostentatiously at his watch.

"Two seconds!" he said.

There was a silence. Archie appeared to be thinking.

"Right-o!" he said at last. "No need to get the wind up. I know where he can go. It's just occurred to me. I'll put him up at my little shop."

The purple ebbed from Mr. Brewster's face. Such was his emotion that he had forgotten that infernal shop. He sat down. There was more silence.

"Oh, gosh!" said Mr. Brewster.

"I knew you would be reasonable about it," said Archie, approvingly. "Now, honestly, as man to man, how do we go?"

"What do you want me to do?" growled Mr. Brewster.

"I thought you might put the chappie up for a while, and give him a chance to look round and nose about a bit."

"I absolutely refuse to give any more loafers free board and lodging."

"Any more?"

"Well, he would be the second, wouldn't he?"

Archie looked pained.

"It's true," he said, "that when I first came here I was temporarily resting, so to speak; but didn't I go right out and grab the managership of your new hotel? Positively!"

"I will *not* adopt this tramp."

"Well, find him a job, then."

"What sort of a job?"

"Oh, any old sort."

"He can be a waiter if he likes."

"All right; I'll put the matter before him."

He returned to the bedroom. The Sausage Chappie was gazing fondly into the mirror with a spotted tie draped round his neck.

"I say, old top," said Archie, apologetically, "the Emperor of the Blighters out yonder says you can have a job here as waiter, and he won't do another dashed thing for you. How about it?"

"Do waiters eat?"

"I suppose so. Though, by Jove, come to think of it, I've never seen one at it."

"That's good enough for me!" said the Sausage Chappie. "When do I begin?"

CHAPTER XIX

REGGIE COMES TO LIFE

THE advantage of having plenty of time on one's hands is that one has leisure to attend to the affairs of all one's circle of friends; and Archie, assiduously as he watched over the destinies of the Sausage Chappie, did not neglect the romantic needs of his brother-in-law Bill. A few days later, Lucille, returning one morning to their mutual suite, found her husband seated in an upright chair at the table, an unusually stern expression on his amiable face. A large cigar was in the corner of his mouth. The fingers of one hand rested in the armhole of his waistcoat: with the other hand he tapped menacingly on the table.

As she gazed upon him, wondering what could be the matter with him, Lucille was suddenly aware of Bill's presence. He had emerged sharply from the bedroom and was walking briskly across the floor. He came to a halt in front of the table.

"Father!" said Bill.

Archie looked up sharply, frowning heavily over his cigar.

"Well, my boy," he said in a strange, rasping voice. "What is it? Speak up, my boy, speak up! Why the devil can't you speak up? This is my busy day!"

"What on earth are you doing?" asked Lucille.

Archie waved her away with the large gesture of a man of blood and iron interrupted while concentrating.

"Leave us, woman! We would be alone! Retire into the jolly old background and amuse yourself for a bit. Read a book. Do acrostics. Charge ahead, laddie."

"Father!" said Bill, again.

"Yes, my boy, yes? What is it?"

"Father!"

Archie picked up the red-covered volume that lay on the table.

"Half a mo', old son. Sorry to stop you, but I knew there was something. I've just remembered. Your walk. All wrong!"

"All wrong?"

"All wrong! Where's the chapter on the Art of Walking? Here we are. Listen, dear old soul. Drink this in. 'In walking, one should strive to acquire that swinging easy movement from the

hips. The correctly-poised walker seems to float along, as it were.' Now, old bean, you didn't float a dam' bit. You just galloped in like a chappie charging into a railway restaurant for a bowl of soup when his train leaves in two minutes. Dashed important, this walking business, you know. Get started wrong, and where are you? Try it again. . . . Much better." He turned to Lucille. "Notice him float along that time? Absolutely skimmed, what?"

Lucille had taken a seat, and was waiting for enlightenment.

"Are you and Bill going into vaudeville?" she asked.

Archie, scrutinising his brother-in-law closely, had further criticism to make.

" 'The man of self-respect and self-confidence,' " he read, " 'stands erect in an easy, natural, graceful attitude. Heels not too far apart, head erect, eyes to the front with a level gaze'—get your gaze level, old thing!—'shoulders thrown back, arms hanging naturally at the sides when not otherwise employed'—that means that, if he tries to hit you, it's all right to guard—'chest expanded naturally, and abdomen'—this is no place for you, Lucille. Leg it out of earshot—'ab—what I said before—drawn in somewhat and above all not protruded.' Now, have you got all that? Yes, you look all right. Carry on, laddie, carry on. Let's have two-penn'orth of the Dynamic Voice and the Tone of Authority—some of the full, rich, round stuff we hear so much about!"

Bill fastened a gimlet eye upon his brother-in-law and drew a deep breath.

"Father!" he said. "Father!"

"You'll have to brighten up Bill's dialogue a lot," said Lucille, critically, "or you will never get bookings."

"Father!"

"I mean, it's all right as far as it goes, but it's sort of monotonous. Besides, one of you ought to be asking questions and the other answering. Bill ought to be saying, 'Who was that lady I saw you coming down the street with?' so that you would be able to say, 'That wasn't a lady. That was my wife.' I *know*! I've been to lots of vaudeville shows."

Bill relaxed his attitude. He deflated his chest, spread his heels, and ceased to draw in his abdomen.

"We'd better try this another time, when we're alone," he said frigidly. "I can't do myself justice."

"Why do you want to do yourself justice?" asked Lucille.

"Right-o!" said Archie, affably, casting off his forbidding expression like a garment. "Rehearsal postponed. I was just putting old Bill through it," he explained, "with a view to getting him into mid-season form for the jolly old pater."

"Oh!" Lucille's voice was the voice of one who sees light in darkness. "When Bill walked in like a cat on hot bricks and stood there looking stuffed, that was just the Personality That Wins!"

"That was it."

"Well, you couldn't blame me for not recognising it, could you?"

Archie patted her head paternally.

"A little less of the caustic critic stuff," he said. "Bill will be all right on the night. If you hadn't come in then and put him off his stroke, he'd have shot out some amazing stuff, full of authority and dynamic accents and what not. I tell you, light of my soul, old Bill is all right! He's got the winning personality up a tree, ready whenever he wants to go and get it. Speaking as his backer and trainer, I think he'll twist your father round his little finger. Absolutely! It wouldn't surprise me if at the end of five minutes the good old dad started jumping through hoops and sitting up for lumps of sugar."

"It would surprise *me*."

"Ah, that's because you haven't seen old Bill in action. You crabbed his act before he had begun to spread himself."

"It isn't that at all. The reason why I think that Bill, however winning his personality may be, won't persuade father to let him marry a girl in the chorus is something that happened last night."

"Last night?"

"Well, at three o'clock this morning. It's on the front page of the early editions of the evening papers. I brought one in for you to see, only you were so busy. Look! There it is!"

Archie seized the paper.

"Oh, Great Scot!"

"What is it?" asked Bill, irritably. "Don't stand goggling there! What the devil is it?"

"Listen to this, old thing!"

REVELRY BY NIGHT.

SPIRITED BATTLE ROYAL AT HOTEL COSMOPOLIS.

THE HOTEL DETECTIVE HAD A GOOD HEART BUT PAULINE
PACKED THE PUNCH.

The logical contender for Jack Dempsey's championship honours has been discovered; and, in an age where women are stealing men's jobs all the time, it will not come as a surprise to our readers to learn that she belongs to the sex that is more deadly than the male. Her name is Miss Pauline Preston, and her wallop is vouched for under oath—under many oaths—by Mr. Timothy O'Neill, known to his intimates as Pie-Face, who holds down the arduous job of detective at the Hotel Cosmopolis.

At three o'clock this morning, Mr. O'Neill was advised by the night-clerk that the occupants of every room within earshot of number 618 had 'phoned the desk to complain of a disturbance, a noise, a vocal uproar proceeding from the room mentioned. Thither, therefore, marched Mr. O'Neill, his face full of cheese-sandwich (for he had been indulging in an early breakfast or a late supper) and his heart of devotion to duty. He found there the Misses Pauline Preston and "Bobbie" St. Clair, of the personnel of the chorus of the Frivolities, entertaining a few friends of either sex. A pleasant time was being had by all, and at the moment of Mr. O'Neill's entry the entire strength of the company was rendering with considerable emphasis that touching ballad, "There's a Place For Me In Heaven, For My Baby-Boy Is There."

The able and efficient officer at once suggested that there was a place for them in the street and the patrol-wagon was there; and, being a man of action as well as words, proceeded to gather up an armful of assorted guests as a preliminary to a personally-conducted tour into the cold night. It was at this point that Miss Preston stepped into the limelight. Mr. O'Neill contends that she hit him with a brick, an iron casing, and the Singer Building. Be that as it may, her efforts were sufficiently able to induce him to retire for reinforcements, which, arriving, arrested the supper-party regardless of age or sex.

At the police-court this morning Miss Preston maintained that she and her friends were merely having a quiet home-evening and that Mr. O'Neill was no gentleman. The male guests gave their names respectively as Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd-George, and William J. Bryan. These, however, are believed to be incorrect. But the moral is, if you want excitement rather than sleep, stay at the Hotel Cosmopolis.

Bill may have quaked inwardly as he listened to this epic, but outwardly he was unmoved.

"Well," he said, "what about it?"

"What about it!" said Lucille.

"What about it!" said Archie. "Why, my dear old friend, it simply means that all the time we've been putting in making your personality winning has been chucked away. Absolutely a dead loss! We might just as well have read a manual on how to knit sweaters."

"I don't see it," maintained Bill, stoutly.

Lucille turned apologetically to her husband.

"You mustn't judge me by him, Archie, darling. This sort of thing doesn't run in the family. We are supposed to be rather

bright on the whole. But poor Bill was dropped by his nurse when he was a baby, and fell on his head."

"I suppose what you're driving at," said the goaded Bill, "is that what has happened will make father pretty sore against girls who happen to be in the chorus?"

"That's absolutely it, old thing. I'm sorry to say. The next person who mentions the word chorus-girl in the jolly old governor's presence is going to take his life in his hands. I tell you, as one man to another, that I'd much rather be back in France hopping over the top than do it myself."

"What darned nonsense! Mabel may be in the chorus, but she isn't like those girls."

"Poor old Bill!" said Lucille. "I'm awfully sorry, but it's no use not facing facts. You know perfectly well that the reputation of the hotel is the thing father cares more about than anything else in the world, and that this is going to make him furious with all the chorus-girls in creation. It's no good trying to explain to him that your Mabel is in the chorus but not of the chorus, so to speak."

"Deuced well put!" said Archie, approvingly. "You're absolutely right. A chorus-girl by the river's brim, so to speak, a simple chorus-girl is to him, as it were, and she is nothing more, if you know what I mean."

"So now," said Lucille, "having shown you that the imbecile scheme which you concocted with my poor well-meaning husband is no good at all, I will bring you words of cheer. Your own original plan—of getting your Mabel a part in a comedy—was always the best one. And you can do it. I wouldn't have broken the bad news so abruptly if I hadn't had some consolation to give you afterwards. I met Reggie van Tuyl just now, wandering about as if the cares of the world were on his shoulders, and he told me that he was putting up most of the money for a new play that's going into rehearsal right away. Reggie's an old friend of yours. All you have to do is to go to him and ask him to use his influence to get your Mabel a small part. There's sure to be a maid or something with only a line or two that won't matter."

"A ripe scheme!" said Archie. "Very sound and fruity!"

The cloud did not lift from Bill's corrugated brow.

"That's all very well," he said. "But you know what a talker Reggie is. He's an obliging sort of chump, but his tongue's fastened on at the middle and waggles at both ends. I don't

want the whole of New York to know about my engagement, and have somebody spilling the news to father, before I'm ready."

"That's all right," said Lucille. "Archie can speak to him. There's no need for him to mention your name at all. He can just say there's a girl he wants to get a part for. You would do it, wouldn't you, angel-face?"

"Like a bird, queen of my soul."

"Then that's splendid. You'd better give Archie that photograph of Mabel to give to Reggie, Bill."

"Photograph?" said Bill. "Which photograph? I have twenty-four!"

Archie found Reggie van Tuyl brooding in a window of his club that looked over Fifth Avenue. Reggie was a rather melancholy young man who suffered from elephantiasis of the bank-roll and the other evils that arise from that complaint. Gentle and sentimental by nature, his sensibilities had been much wounded by contact with a sordid world; and the thing that had first endeared Archie to him was the fact that the latter, though chronically hard-up, had never made any attempt to borrow money from him. Reggie would have parted with it on demand, but it had delighted him to find that Archie seemed to take a pleasure in his society without having any ulterior motives. He was fond of Archie, and also of Lucille; and their happy marriage was a constant source of gratification to him.

For Reggie was a sentimentalist. He would have liked to live in a world of ideally united couples, himself ideally united to some charming and affectionate girl. But, as a matter of cold fact, he was a bachelor, and most of the couples he knew were veterans of several divorces. In Reggie's circle, therefore, the home-life of Archie and Lucille shone like a good deed in a naughty world. It inspired him. In moments of depression it restored his waning faith in human nature.

Consequently, when Archie, having greeted him and slipped into a chair at his side, suddenly produced from his inside pocket the photograph of an extremely pretty girl and asked him to get her a small part in the play which he was financing, he was shocked and disappointed. He was in a more than usually sentimental mood that afternoon, and had, indeed, at the moment of Archie's arrival, been dreaming wistfully of soft arms clasped

snugly about his collar and the patter of little feet and all that sort of thing. He gazed reproachfully at Archie.

"Archie!" His voice quivered with emotion. "Is it worth it? Is it worth it, old man? Think of the poor little woman at home!" Archie was puzzled.

"Eh, old top? Which poor little woman?"

"Think of her trust in you, her faith——"

"I don't absolutely get you, old bean."

"What would Lucille say if she knew about this?"

"Oh, she does. She knows all about it."

"Good heavens!" cried Reggie. He was shocked to the core of his being. One of the articles of his faith was that the union of Lucille and Archie was different from those loose partnerships which were the custom in his world. He had not been conscious of such a poignant feeling that the foundations of the universe were cracked and tottering and that there was no light and sweetness in life since the morning, eighteen months back, when a negligent valet had sent him out into Fifth Avenue with only one spat on.

"It was Lucille's idea," explained Archie. He was about to mention his brother-in-law's connection with the matter, but checked himself in time, remembering Bill's specific objection to having his secret revealed to Reggie. "It's like this, old thing, I've never met this female, but she's a pal of Lucille's"—he comforted his conscience by the reflection that, if she wasn't now, she would be in a few days—"and Lucille wants to do her a bit of good. She's been on the stage in England, you know, supporting a jolly old widowed mother and educating a little brother and all that kind and species of rot, you understand, and now she's coming over to America, and Lucille wants you to rally round and shove her into your show and generally keep the home fires burning and so forth. How do we go?"

Reggie beamed with relief. He felt just as he had felt on that other occasion at the moment when a taxi-cab had rolled up and enabled him to hide his spatless leg from the public gaze.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "Why, delighted, old man, quite delighted!"

"Any small part would do. Isn't there a maid or something in your bob's-worth of refined entertainment who drifts about saying, 'Yes, madam,' and all that sort of thing? Well, then, that's just the thing. Topping! I knew I could rely on you, old bird. I'll get

Lucille to ship her round to your address when she arrives. I fancy she's due to totter in somewhere in the next few days. Well, I must be popping. Toodle-oo!"

"Pip-pip!" said Reggie.

It was about a week later that Lucille came into the suite at the Hotel Cosmopolis that was her home, and found Archie lying on the couch, smoking a refreshing pipe after the labours of the day. It seemed to Archie that his wife was not in her usual cheerful frame of mind. He kissed her, and, having relieved her of her parasol, endeavoured without success to balance it on his chin. Having picked it up from the floor and placed it on the table, he became aware that Lucille was looking at him in a despondent sort of way. Her grey eyes were clouded.

"Halloa, old thing," said Archie. "What's up?"

Lucille sighed wearily.

"Archie, darling, do you know any really good swear-words?"

"Well," said Archie, reflectively, "let me see. I did pick up a few tolerably ripe and breezy expressions out in France. All through my military career there was something about me—some subtle magnetism, don't you know, and that sort of thing—that seemed to make colonels and blighters of that order rather inventive. I sort of inspired them, don't you know. I remember one brass-hat addressing me for quite ten minutes, saying something new all the time. And even then he seemed to think he had only touched the fringe of the subject. As a matter of fact, he said straight out in the most frank and confiding way that mere words couldn't do justice to me. But why?"

"Because I want to relieve my feelings."

"Anything wrong?"

"Everything's wrong. I've just been having tea with Bill and his Mabel."

"Oh, ah!" said Archie, interested. "And what's the verdict?"

"Guilty!" said Lucille. "And the sentence, if I had anything to do with it, would be transportation for life." She peeled off her gloves irritably. "What fools men are! Not you, precious! You're the only man in the world that isn't, it seems to me. You did marry a nice girl, didn't you? *You* didn't go running round after females with crimson hair, goggling at them with your eyes popping out of your head like a bulldog waiting for a bone."

"Oh, I say! Does old Bill look like that?"

"Worse!"

Archie rose to a point of order.

"But one moment, old lady. You speak of crimson hair. Surely old Bill—in the extremely jolly monologues he used to deliver whenever I didn't see him coming and he got me alone—used to allude to her hair as brown."

"It isn't brown now. It's bright scarlet. Good gracious, I ought to know. I've been looking at it all the afternoon. It dazzled me. If I've got to meet her again, I mean to go to the oculist's and get a pair of those smoked glasses you wear at Palm Beach." Lucille brooded silently for a while over the tragedy. "I don't want to say anything against her, of course."

"No, no, of course not."

"But of all the awful, second-rate girls I ever met, she's the worst! She has vermilion hair and an imitation Oxford manner. She's so horribly refined that it's dreadful to listen to her. She's a sly, creepy, slinky, made-up, insincere vampire! She's common! She's awful! She's a cat!"

"You're quite right not to say anything against her," said Archie, approvingly. "It begins to look," he went on, "as if the good old pater was about due for another shock. He has a hard life!"

"If Bill *dares* to introduce that girl to father, he's taking his life in his hands."

"But surely that was the idea—the scheme—the wheeze, wasn't it? Or do you think there's any chance of his weakening?"

"Weakening! You should have seen him looking at her! It was like a small boy flattening his nose against the window of a candy-store."

"Bit thick!"

Lucille kicked the leg of the table.

"And to think," she said, "that, when I was a little girl, I used to look up to Bill as a monument of wisdom. I used to hug his knees and gaze into his face and wonder how anyone could be so magnificent." She gave the unoffending table another kick. "If I could have looked into the future," she said, with feeling, "I'd have bitten him in the ankle!"

In the days which followed, Archie found himself a little out of touch with Bill and his romance. Lucille referred to the matter only when he brought the subject up, and made it plain that the

topic of her future sister-in-law was not one which she enjoyed discussing. Mr. Brewster, senior, when Archie, by way of delicately preparing his mind for what was about to befall, asked him if he liked red hair, called him a fool, and told him to go away and bother someone else when they were busy. The only person who could have kept him thoroughly abreast of the trend of affairs was Bill himself; and experience had made Archie wary in the matter of meeting Bill. The position of confidant to a young man in the early stages of love is no sinecure, and it made Archie sleepy even to think of having to talk to his brother-in-law. He sedulously avoided his love-lorn relative, and it was with a sinking feeling one day that, looking over his shoulder as he sat in the Cosmopolis grill-room preparatory to ordering lunch, he perceived Bill bearing down upon him, obviously resolved upon joining his meal.

To his surprise, however, Bill did not instantly embark upon his usual monologue. Indeed, he hardly spoke at all. He champed a chop, and seemed to Archie to avoid his eye. It was not till lunch was over and they were smoking that he unburdened himself.

"Archie!" he said.

"Hallo, old thing!" said Archie. "Still there? I thought you'd died or something. Talk about your old pals, Tongue-tied Thomas and Silent Sammy! You could beat 'em both on the same evening."

"It's enough to make me silent."

"What is?"

Bill had relapsed into a sort of waking dream. He sat frowning sombrely, lost to the world. Archie, having waited what seemed to him a sufficient length of time for an answer to his question, bent forward and touched his brother-in-law's hand gently with the lighted end of his cigar. Bill came to himself with a howl.

"What is?" said Archie.

"What is what?" said Bill.

"Now listen, old thing," protested Archie. "Life is short and time is flying. Suppose we cut out the cross-talk. You hinted there was something on your mind—something worrying the old bean—and I'm waiting to hear what it is."

Bill fiddled a moment with his coffee-spoon.

"I'm in an awful hole," he said at last.

"What's the trouble?"

"It's about that darned girl!"

Archie blinked.

"What!"

"That darned girl!"

Archie could scarcely credit his senses. He had been prepared—indeed, he had steeled himself—to hear Bill allude to his affinity in a number of ways. But "that darned girl" was not one of them.

"Companion of my riper years," he said, "let's get this thing straight. When you say 'that darned girl,' do you by any possibility allude to——?"

"Of course I do!"

"But, William, old bird——"

"Oh, I know, I know, I know!" said Bill, irritably. "You're surprised to hear me talk like that about her?"

"A trifle, yes. Possibly a trifle. When last heard from, laddie, you must recollect, you were speaking of the lady as your soul-mate, and at least once—if I remember rightly—you alluded to her as your little dusky-haired lamb."

A sharp howl escaped Bill.

"Don't!" A strong shudder convulsed his frame. "Don't remind me of it!"

"There's been a species of slump, then, in dusky-haired lambs?"

"How," demanded Bill, savagely, "can a girl be a dusky-haired lamb when her hair's bright scarlet?"

"Dashed difficult!" admitted Archie.

"I suppose Lucille told you about that?"

"She did touch on it. Lightly, as it were. With a sort of gossamer touch, so to speak."

Bill threw off the last fragments of reserve.

"Archie, I'm in the devil of a fix. I don't know why it was, but directly I saw her—things seemed so different over in England—I mean." He swallowed ice-water in gulps. "I suppose it was seeing her with Lucille. Old Lu is such a thoroughbred. Seemed to kind of show her up. Like seeing imitation pearls by the side of real pearls. And that crimson hair! It sort of put the lid on it." Bill brooded morosely. "It ought to be a criminal offence for women to dye their hair. Especially red. What the devil do women do that sort of thing for?"

"Don't blame me, old thing. It's not my fault."

Bill looked furtive and harassed.

"It makes me feel such a cad. Here am I, feeling that I would give all I've got in the world to get out of the darned thing, and all the time the poor girl seems to be getting fonder of me than ever."

"How do you know?" Archie surveyed his brother-in-law critically. "Perhaps her feelings have changed too. Very possibly she may not like the colour of *your* hair. I don't myself. Now, if you were to dye yourself crimson——"

"Oh, shut up! Of course a man knows when a girl's fond of him."

"By no means, laddie. When you're my age——"

"I *am* your age."

"So you are! I forgot that. Well, now, approaching the matter from another angle, let us suppose, old son, that Miss What's-Her-Name—the party of the second part——"

"Stop it!" said Bill, suddenly. "Here comes Reggie!"

"Eh?"

"Here comes Reggie van Tuyl. I don't want him to hear us talking about the darned thing."

Archie looked over his shoulder and perceived that it was indeed so. Reggie was threading his way among the tables.

"Well, *he* looks pleased with things, anyway," said Bill, enviously. "Glad somebody's happy."

He was right. Reggie van Tuyl's usual mode of progress through a restaurant was a somnolent slouch. Now he was positively bounding along. Furthermore, the usual expression on Reggie's face was a sleepy sadness. Now he smiled brightly and with animation. He curveted towards their table, beaming and erect, his head up, his gaze level, and his chest expanded, for all the world as if he had been reading the hints in *The Personality That Wins*.

Archie was puzzled. Something had plainly happened to Reggie. But what? It was idle to suppose that somebody had left him money, for he had been left practically all the money there was a matter of ten years before.

"Hallo, old bean," he said, as the new-comer, radiating good will and bonhomie, arrived at the table and hung over it like a noon-day sun. "We've finished. But rally round and we'll watch you eat. Dashed interesting, watching old Reggie eat. Why go to the Zoo?"

Reggie shook his head.

"Sorry, old man. Can't. Just on my way to the Ritz. Stepped in because I thought you might be here. I wanted you to be the first to hear the news."

"News?"

"I'm the happiest man alive!"

"You look it, darn you!" growled Bill, on whose mood of grey gloom this human sunbeam was jarring heavily.

"I'm engaged to be married!"

"Congratulations, old egg!" Archie shook his hand cordially. "Dash it, don't you know, as an old married man I like to see you young fellows settling down."

"I don't know how to thank you enough, Archie, old man," said Reggie, fervently.

"Thank me?"

"It was through you that I met her. Don't you remember the girl you sent to me? You wanted me to get her a small part——"

He stopped, puzzled. Archie had uttered a sound that was half gasp and half gurgle, but it was swallowed up in the extraordinary noise from the other side of the table. Bill Brewster was leaning forward with bulging eyes and soaring eyebrows.

"Are you engaged to Mabel Winchester?"

"Why, by George!" said Reggie. "Do you know her?"

Archie recovered himself.

"Slightly," he said. "Slightly. Old Bill knows her slightly, as it were. Not very well, don't you know, but—how shall I put it?"

"Slightly," suggested Bill.

"Just the word. Slightly."

"Splendid!" said Reggie van Tuyl. "Why don't you come along to the Ritz and meet her now?"

Bill stammered. Archie came to the rescue again.

"Bill can't come now. He's got a date."

"A date?" said Bill.

"A date," said Archie. "An appointment, don't you know. A—a—in fact, a date."

"But—er—wish her happiness from me," said Bill, cordially.

"Thanks very much, old man," said Reggie.

"And say I'm delighted, will you?"

"Certainly."

"You won't forget the word, will you? Delighted."

"Delighted."

"That's right. Delighted."

Reggie looked at his watch.

"Halloa! I must rush!"

Bill and Archie watched him as he bounded out of the restaurant.

"Poor old Reggie!" said Bill, with a fleeting compunction.

"Not necessarily," said Archie. "What I mean to say is, tastes differ, don't you know. One man's peach is another man's poison, and vice versa."

"There's something in that."

"Absolutely! Well," said Archie, judicially, "this would appear to be, as it were, the maddest, merriest day in all the glad New Year, yes, no?"

Bill drew a deep breath.

"You bet your sorrowful existence it is!" he said. "I'd like to do something to celebrate it."

"The right spirit!" said Archie. "Absolutely the right spirit! Begin by paying for my lunch!"

CHAPTER XX

THE SAUSAGE CHAPPIE CLICKS

RENDERED restless by relief, Bill Brewster did not linger long at the luncheon-table. Shortly after Reggie van Tuyl had retired, he got up and announced his intention of going for a bit of a walk to calm his excited mind. Archie dismissed him with a courteous wave of the hand; and, beckoning to the Sausage Chappie, who in his rôle of waiter was hovering near, requested him to bring the best cigar the hotel could supply. The padded seat in which he sat was comfortable; he had no engagements; and it seemed to him that a pleasant half-hour could be passed in smoking dreamily and watching his fellow-men eat.

The grill-room had filled up. The Sausage Chappie, having brought Archie his cigar, was attending to a table close by, at which a woman with a small boy in a sailor suit had seated themselves. The woman was engrossed with the bill of fare, but the child's attention seemed riveted upon the Sausage Chappie. He was drinking him in with wide eyes. He seemed to be brooding on him.

Archie, too, was brooding on the Sausage Chappie. The latter made an excellent waiter: he was brisk and attentive, and did the work as if he liked it; but Archie was not satisfied. Something seemed to tell him that the man was fitted for higher things. Archie was a grateful soul. That sausage, coming at the end of a five-hour hike, had made a deep impression on his plastic nature. Reason told him that only an exceptional man could have parted with half a sausage at such a moment; and he could not feel that a job as waiter at a New York hotel was an adequate job for an exceptional man. Of course, the root of the trouble lay in the fact that the fellow could not remember what his real life-work had been before the war. It was exasperating to reflect, as the other moved away to take his order to the kitchen, that there, for all one knew, went the dickens of a lawyer, doctor, architect or what not.

His meditations were broken by the voice of the child.

"Mummie," asked the child interestedly, following the Sausage Chappie with his eyes as the latter disappeared towards the kitchen, "why has that man got such a funny face?"

"Hush, darling."

"Yes, but why *has* he?"

"I don't know, darling."

The child's faith in the maternal omniscience seemed to have received a shock. He had the air of a seeker after truth who has been baffled. His eyes roamed the room discontentedly.

"He's got a funnier face than that man there," he said, pointing to Archie.

"Hush, darling!"

"But he has. Much funnier."

In a way it was a sort of compliment, but Archie felt embarrassed. He withdrew cooly into the cushioned recess. Presently the Sausage Chappie returned, attended to the needs of the woman and the child, and came over to Archie. His homely face was beaming.

"Say, I had a big night last night," he said, leaning on the table.

"Yes?" said Archie. "Party or something?"

"No, I mean I suddenly began to remember things. Something seems to have happened to the works.

Archie sat up excitedly. This was great news.

"No, really? My dear old lad, this is absolutely topping. This is priceless."

"Yessir! First thing I remembered was that I was born at Springfield, Ohio. It was like a mist starting to life. Springfield, Ohio. That was it. It suddenly came back to me."

"Splendid! Anything else?"

"Yessir! Just before I went to sleep I remembered my name as well."

Archie was stirred to his depths.

"Why, the thing's a walk-over!" he exclaimed. "Now you've once got started, nothing can stop you. What is your name?"

"Why, it's—— That's funny! It's gone again. I have an idea it began with an S. What was it? Skeffington? Skillington?"

"Sanderson?"

"No; I'll get it in a moment. Cunningham? Carrington? Wilberforce? Debenham?"

"Dennison?" suggested Archie, helpfully.

"No, no, no. It's on the tip of my tongue. Barrington? Montgomery? Hepplethwaite? I've got it! Smith!"

"By Jove! Really?"

"Certain of it."

"What's the first name?"

An anxious expression came into the man's eyes. He hesitated. He lowered his voice. "I have a horrible feeling that it's Lancelot!"

"Good God!" said Archie.

"It couldn't really be that, could it?"

Archie looked grave. He hated to give pain, but he felt he must be honest.

"It might," he said. "People give their children all sorts of rummy names. My second name's Tracy. And I have a pal in England who was christened Cuthbert de la Hay Horace. Fortunately everyone calls him Stinker."

The head-waiter began to drift up like a bank of fog, and the Sausage Chappie returned to his professional duties. When he came back, he was beaming again.

"Something else I remembered," he said, removing the cover. "I'm married!"

"Good Lord!"

"At least I was before the war. She had blue eyes and brown hair and a Pekingese dog."

"What was her name?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you're coming on," said Archie. "I'll admit that. You've still got a bit of a way to go before you become like one of those blighters who take the Memory Training Courses in the magazine advertisements—I mean to say, you know, the lads who meet a fellow once for five minutes, and then come across him again ten years later and grasp him by the hand and say, 'Surely this is Mr. Watkins of Seattle?' Still, you're doing fine. You only need patience. Everything comes to him who waits." Archie sat up, electrified. "I say, by Jove, that's rather good, what! Everything comes to him who waits, and you're a waiter, what, what. I mean to say, what!"

"Mummie," said the child at the other table, still speculative, "do you think something trod on his face?"

"Hush, darling."

"Perhaps it was bitten by something?"

"Eat your nice fish, darling," said the mother, who seemed to be one of those dull-witted persons whom it is impossible to interest in a discussion on first causes.

Archie felt stimulated. Not even the advent of his father-in-law, who came in a few moments later and sat down at the other end of the room, could depress his spirits.

The Sausage Chappie came to his table again.

"It's a funny thing," he said. "Like waking up after you've been asleep. Everything seems to be getting clearer. The dog's name was Marie. My wife's dog, you know. And she had a mole on her chin."

"The dog?"

"No. My wife. Little beast! She bit me in the leg once."

"Your wife?"

"No. The dog. Good Lord!" said the Sausage Chappie.

Archie looked up and followed his gaze.

A couple of tables away, next to a sideboard on which the management exposed for view the cold meats and puddings and pies mentioned in volume two of the bill of fare ("Buffet Froid"), a man and a girl had just seated themselves. The man was stout and middle-aged. He bulged in practically every place in which a man can bulge, and his head was almost entirely free from hair. The girl was young and pretty. Her eyes were blue. Her hair was brown. She had a rather attractive mole on the left side of her chin.

"Good Lord!" said the Sausage Chappie.

"Now what?" said Archie.

"Who's that? Over at the table there?"

Archie, through long attendance at the Cosmopolis Grill, knew most of the habitués by sight.

"That's a man named Gossett. James J. Gossett. He's a motion-picture man. You must have seen his name around."

"I don't mean him. Who's the girl?"

"I've never seen her before."

"It's my wife!" said the Sausage Chappie.

"Your wife!"

"Yes!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure!"

"Well, well, well!" said Archie. "Many happy returns of the day!"

At the other table, the girl, unconscious of the drama which was about to enter her life, was engrossed in conversation with the stout man. And at this moment the stout man leaned forward and patted her on the cheek.

It was a paternal pat, the pat which a genial uncle might bestow on a favourite niece, but it did not strike the Sausage Chappie in that light. He had been advancing on the table at a fairly rapid

pace, and now, stirred to his depths, he bounded forward with a hoarse cry.

Archie was at some pains to explain to his father-in-law later that, if the management left cold pies and things about all over the place, this sort of thing was bound to happen sooner or later. He urged that it was putting temptation in people's way, and that Mr. Brewster had only himself to blame. Whatever the rights of the case, the Buffet Froid undoubtedly came in remarkably handy at this crisis in the Sausage Chappie's life. He had almost reached the sideboard when the stout man patted the girl's cheek, and to seize a huckleberry pie was with him the work of a moment. The next instant the pie had whizzed past the other's head and burst like a shell against the wall.

There are, no doubt, restaurants where this sort of thing would have excited little comment, but the Cosmopolis was not one of them. Everybody had something to say, but the only one among those present who had anything sensible to say was the child in the sailor suit.

"Do it again!" said the child, cordially.

The Sausage Chappie did it again. He took up a fruit salad, poised it for a moment, then decanted it over Mr. Gossett's bald head. The child's happy laughter rang over the restaurant. Whatever anybody else might think of the affair, this child liked it and was prepared to go on record to that effect.

Epic events have a stunning quality. They paralyse the faculties. For a moment there was a pause. The world stood still. Mr. Brewster bubbled inarticulately. Mr. Gossett dried himself sketchily with a napkin. The Sausage Chappie snorted.

The girl had risen to her feet and was staring wildly.

"John!" she cried.

Even at this moment of crisis the Sausage Chappie was able to look relieved.

"So it is!" he said. "And I thought it was Lancelot!"

"I thought you were dead!"

"I'm not!" said the Sausage Chappie.

Mr. Gossett, speaking thickly through the fruit-salad, was understood to say that he regretted this. And then confusion broke loose again. Everybody began to talk at once.

"I say!" said Archie. "I say! One moment!"

Of the first stages of this interesting episode Archie had been a paralysed spectator. The thing had numbed him. And then—

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

Sudden a thought came, like a full-blown rose.
Flushing his brow.

When he reached the gesticulating group, he was calm and business-like. He had a constructive policy to suggest.

"I say," he said. "I've got an idea!"

"Go away!" said Mr. Brewster. "This is bad enough without you butting in."

Archie quelled him with a gesture.

"Leave us," he said. "We would be alone. I want to have a little business-talk with Mr. Gossett." He turned to the movie-magnate, who was gradually emerging from the fruit-salad rather after the manner of a stout Venus rising from the sea. "Can you spare me a moment of your valuable time?"

"I'll have him arrested!"

"Don't you do it, laddie. Listen!"

"The man's mad. Throwing pies!"

Archie attached himself to his coat-button.

"Be calm, laddie. Calm and reasonable!"

For the first time Mr. Gossett became aware that what he had been looking on as a vague annoyance was really an individual.

"Who the devil are you?"

Archie drew himself up with dignity.

"I am this gentleman's representative," he replied, indicating the Sausage Chappie with a motion of the hand. "His jolly old personal representative. I act for him. And on his behalf I have a pretty ripe proposition to lay before you. Reflect, dear old bean," he proceeded earnestly. "Are you going to let this chance slip? The opportunity of a lifetime which will not occur again. By Jove, you ought to rise up and embrace this bird. You ought to clasp the chappie to your bosom! He has thrown pies at you, hasn't he? Very well. You are a movie-magnate. Your whole fortune is founded on chappies who throw pies. You probably scour the world for chappies who throw pies. Yet, when one comes right to you without any fuss or trouble and demonstrates before your very eyes the fact that he is without a peer as a pie-propeller, you get the wind up and talk about having him arrested. Consider! (There's a bit of cherry just behind your left ear.) Be sensible. Why let your personal feelings stand in the way of doing yourself a bit of good? Give this chappie a job and give it him quick, or we go elsewhere. Did you ever see Fatty Arbuckle handle pastry with a surer touch? Has Charlie Chaplin got this fellow's speed

and control? Absolutely not. I tell you, old friend, you're in danger of throwing away a good thing!"

He paused. The Sausage Chappie beamed.

"I've always wanted to go into the movies," he said. "I was an actor before the war. Just remembered."

Mr. Brewster attempted to speak. Archie waved him down.

"How many times have I got to tell you not to butt in?" he said, severely.

Mr. Gossett's militant demeanor had become a trifle modified during Archie's harangue. First and foremost a man of business, Mr. Gossett was not insensible to the arguments which had been put forward. He brushed a slice of orange from the back of his neck, and mused awhile.

"How do I know this fellow would screen well?" he said, at length.

"Screen well!" cried Archie. "Of course he'll screen well. Look at his face. I ask you! The map! I call your attention to it." He turned apologetically to the Sausage Chappie. "Awfully sorry, old lad, for dwelling on this, but it's business, you know." He turned to Mr. Gossett. "Did you ever see a face like that? Of course not. Why should I, as this gentleman's personal representative, let a face like that go to waste? There's a fortune in it. By Jove, I'll give you two minutes to think the thing over, and, if you don't talk business then, I'll jolly well take my man straight round to Mack Sennett or someone. We don't have to ask for jobs. We consider offers.

There was a silence. And then the clear voice of the child in the sailor suit made itself heard again.

"Mummie!"

"Yes, darling?"

"Is the man with the funny face going to throw any more pies?"

"No, darling."

The child uttered a scream of disappointed fury.

"I want the funny man to throw some more pies! I want the funny man to throw some more pies!"

A look almost of awe came into Mr. Gossett's face. He had heard the voice of the Public. He had felt the beating of the Public's pulse.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," he said, picking a piece of banana off his right eyebrow. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. Come round to my office!"

THE GROWING BOY

THE lobby of the Cosmopolis Hotel was a favourite stamping-ground of Mr. Daniel Brewster, its proprietor. He liked to wander about there, keeping a paternal eye on things, rather in the manner of the Jolly Innkeeper (hereinafter to be referred to as Mine Host) of the old-fashioned novel. Customers who, hurrying in to dinner, tripped over Mr. Brewster, were apt to mistake him for the hotel detective—for his eye was keen and his aspect a trifle austere—but, nevertheless, he was being as jolly an innkeeper as he knew how. His presence in the lobby supplied a personal touch to the Cosmopolis which other New York hotels lacked, and it undeniably made the girl at the book-stall extraordinarily civil to her clients, which was all to the good.

Most of the time Mr. Brewster stood in one spot and just looked thoughtful; but now and again he would wander to the marble slab behind which he kept the desk-clerk and run his eye over the register, to see who had booked rooms—like a child examining the stocking on Christmas morning to ascertain what Santa Claus had brought him.

As a rule, Mr. Brewster concluded this performance by shoving the book back across the marble slab and resuming his meditations. But one night, a week or two after the Sausage Chappie's sudden restoration to the normal, he varied this procedure by starting rather violently, turning purple, and uttering an exclamation which was manifestly an exclamation of chagrin. He turned abruptly and cannoned into Archie, who, in company with Lucille, happened to be crossing the lobby at the moment on his way to dine in their suite.

Mr. Brewster apologised gruffly; then, recognising his victim, seemed to regret having done so.

"Oh, it's you! Why can't you look where you're going?" he demanded. He had suffered much from his son-in-law.

"Frightfully sorry," said Archie, amiably. "Never thought you were going to fox-trot backwards all over the fairway."

"You mustn't bully Archie," said Lucille, severely, attaching herself to her father's back hair and giving it a punitive tug,

"because he's an angel, and I love him, and you must learn to love him, too."

"Give you lessons at a reasonable rate," murmured Archie.

Mr. Brewster regarded his young relative with a lowering eye.

"What's the matter, father darling?" asked Lucille. "You seem upset."

"I am upset!" Mr. Brewster snorted. "Some people have got a nerve!" He glowered forbiddingly at an inoffensive young man in a light overcoat who had just entered, and the young man, though his conscience was quite clear and Mr. Brewster an entire stranger to him, stopped dead, blushed, and went out—to dine elsewhere. "Some people have got the nerve of an army mule!"

"Why, what's happened?"

"Those darned McCalls have registered here!"

"No!"

"Bit beyond me, this," said Archie, insinuating himself into the conversation. "Deep waters and what not! Who are the McCalls?"

"Some people father dislikes," said Lucille. "And they've chosen his hotel to stop at. But, father dear, you mustn't mind. It's really a compliment. They've come because they know it's the best hotel in New York."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Good accommodation for man and beast! All the comforts of home! Look on the bright side, old bean. No good getting the wind up. Cheerio, old companion!"

"Don't call me old companion!"

"Eh, what? Oh, right-o!"

Lucille steered her husband out of the danger zone, and they entered the lift.

"Poor father!" she said, as they went to their suite, "it's a shame. They must have done it to annoy him. This man McCall has a place next to some property father bought in Westchester, and he's bringing a law-suit against father about a bit of land which he claims belongs to him. He might have had the tact to go to another hotel. But, after all, I don't suppose it was the poor little fellow's fault. He does whatever his wife tells him to."

"We all do that," said Archie the married man.

Lucille eyed him fondly.

"Isn't it a shame, precious, that all husbands haven't nice wives like me?"

"When I think of you, by Jove," said Archie, fervently, "I want to babble, absolutely babble!"

"Oh, I was telling you about the McCalls. Mr. McCall is one of those, little, meek men, and his wife's one of those big, bullying women. It was she who started all the trouble with father. Father and Mr. McCall were very fond of each other till she made him begin the suit. I feel sure she made him come to this hotel just to annoy father. Still, they've probably taken the most expensive suite in the place, which is something."

Archie was at the telephone. His mood was now one of quiet peace. Of all the happenings which went to make up existence in New York, he liked best the cosy *tête-à-tête* dinners with Lucille in their suite, which, owing to their engagements—for Lucille was a popular girl, with many friends—occurred all too seldom.

"Touching now the question of browsing and sluicing," he said. "I'll be getting them to send along a waiter."

"Oh, good gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"I've just remembered. I promised faithfully I would go and see Jane Murchison to-day. And I clean forgot. I must rush.

"But, light of my soul, we are about to eat. Pop round and see her after dinner."

"I can't. She's going to a theatre to-night."

"Give her the jolly old miss-in-baulk, then, for the nonce, and spring round to-morrow."

"She's sailing for England to-morrow morning, early. No, I must go and see her now. What a shame! She's sure to make me stop to dinner. I tell you what. Order something for me, and, if I'm not back in half an hour, start."

"Jane Murchison," said Archie, "is a bally nuisance."

"Yes. But I've known her since she was eight."

"If her parents had had any proper feeling," said Archie, "they would have drowned her long before that."

He unhooked the receiver, and asked despondently to be connected with Room Service. He thought bitterly of the exigent Jane, whom he recollected dimly as a tall female with teeth. He half thought of going down to the grill-room on the chance of finding a friend there, but the waiter was on his way to the room. He decided that he might as well stay where he was.

The waiter arrived, booked the order, and departed. Archie had just completed his toilet after a shower-bath when a musical clinking without announced the advent of the meal. He opened the

door. The waiter was there with a table congested with things under covers, from which escaped a savoury and appetising odour. In spite of his depression, Archie's soul perked up a trifle.

Suddenly he became aware that he was not the only person present who was deriving enjoyment from the scent of the meal. Standing beside the waiter and gazing wistfully at the foodstuffs was a long, thin boy of about sixteen. He was one of those boys who seem all legs and knuckles. He had pale red hair, sandy eye-lashes, and a long neck; and his eyes, as he removed them from the table and raised them to Archie's, had a hungry look. He reminded Archie of a half-grown, half-starved hound.

"That smells good!" said the long boy. He inhaled. "Yes, sir," he continued, as one whose mind is definitely made up, "—that smells good!"

Before Archie could reply, the telephone bell rang. It was Lucille, confirming her prophecy that the pest Jane would insist on her staying to dine.

"Jane," said Archie, into the telephone, "is a pot of poison. The waiter is here now, setting out a rich banquet, and I shall have to eat two of everything by myself."

He hung up the receiver, and, turning met the pale eye of the long boy, who had propped himself up in the doorway.

"Were you expecting somebody to dinner?" asked the boy.

"Why, yes, old friend, I was."

"I wish——"

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing."

The waiter left. The long boy hitched his back more firmly against the doorpost, and returned to his original theme.

"That surely does smell good!" He basked a moment in the aroma. "Yes, sir! I'll tell the world it does!"

Archie was not an abnormally rapid thinker, but he began at this point to get a clearly defined impression that this lad, if invited, would waive the formalities and consent to join his meal. Indeed, the idea Archie got was that, if he were not invited pretty soon, he would invite himself.

"Yes," he agreed. "It doesn't smell bad, what!"

"It smells *good*!" said the boy. "Oh, doesn't it! Wake me up in the night and ask me if it doesn't!"

"*Poulet en casserole*," said Archie.

"Golly!" said the boy, reverently.

There was a pause. The situation began to seem to Archie a trifle difficult. He wanted to start his meal, but it began to appear that he must either do so under the penetrating gaze of his new friend or else eject the latter forcibly. The boy showed no signs of ever wanting to leave the doorway.

"You've dined, I suppose, what?" said Archie.

"I never dine."

"What!"

"Not really dine. I only get vegetables and nuts and things."

"Dieting?"

"Mother is."

"I don't absolutely catch the drift, old bean," said Archie. The boy sniffed with half-closed eyes as a wave of perfume from the *poulet en casserole* floated past him. He seemed to be anxious to intercept as much of it as possible before it got through the door.

"Mother's a food-reformer," he vouchsafed. "She lectures on it. She makes pop and me live on vegetables and nuts and things."

Archie was shocked. It was like listening to a tale from the abyss.

"My dear old chap, you must suffer agonies—absolute shooting pains!" He had no hesitation now. Common humanity pointed out his course. "Would you care to join me in a bite now?"

"Would I!" The boy smiled a wan smile. "Would I! Just stop me on the street and ask me!"

"Come on in, then," said Archie, rightly taking this peculiar phrase for a formal acceptance. "And close the door. The fatted calf is getting cold."

Archie was not a man with a wide visiting-list among people with families, and it was so long since he had seen a growing boy in action at the table that he had forgotten what sixteen is capable of doing with a knife and fork, when it really squares its elbows, takes a deep breath, and gets going. The spectacle which he witnessed was consequently at first a little unnerving. The long boy's idea of trifling with a meal appeared to be to swallow it whole and reach out for more. He ate like a starving Eskimo. Archie, in the time he had spent in the trenches making the world safe for the working-man to strike in, had occasionally been quite peckish, but he sat dazed before this majestic hunger. This was real eating.

There was little conversation. The growing boy evidently did not believe in table-talk when he could use his mouth for more practical purposes. It was not until the final roll had been devoured to its last crumb that the guest found leisure to address his host.

Then he leaned back with a contented sigh.

"Mother," said the human python, "says you ought to chew every mouthful thirty-three times. . . ."

"Yes, sir! Thirty-three times!" He sighed again. "I haven't ever had a meal like that."

"All right, was it, what?"

"Was it! Was it! Call me up on the 'phone and ask me! Yes, sir! Mother's tipped off these darned waiters not to serve me anything but vegetables and nuts and things, darn it!"

"The mater seems to have drastic ideas about the good old feed-bag, what!"

"I'll say she has! Pop hates it as much as me, but he's scared to kick. Mother says vegetables contain all the proteids you want. Mother says, if you eat meat, your blood-pressure goes all bloeey. Do you think it does?"

"Mine seems pretty well in the pink."

"She's great on talking," conceded the boy. "She's out to-night somewhere, giving a lecture on Rational Eating to some ginks. I'll have to be slipping up to our suite before she gets back." He rose, sluggishly. "That isn't a bit of roll under that napkin, is it?" he asked, anxiously.

Archie raised the napkin.

"No. Nothing of that species."

"Oh, well!" said the boy, resignedly. "Then I believe I'll be going. Thanks very much for the dinner."

"Not a bit, old top. Come again if you're ever trickling round in this direction."

The long boy removed himself slowly, loath to leave. At the door he cast an affectionate glance back at the table.

"Some meal!" he said, devoutly. "Considerable meal!"

Archie lit a cigarette. He felt like a Boy Scout who has done his day's Act of Kindness.

On the following morning it chanced that Archie needed a fresh supply of tobacco. It was his custom, when this happened, to repair to a small shop on Sixth Avenue which he had discovered accidentally in the course of his rambles about the great city. His relations with Jno. Blake, the proprietor, were friendly and intimate. The discovery that Mr. Blake was English and had, indeed, until a few years back maintained an establishment only a dozen doors or so from Archie's London club, had served as a bond.

To-day he found Mr. Blake in a depressed mood. The tobacconist was a hearty, red-faced man, who looked like an English sporting publican—the kind of man who wears a fawn-coloured top-coat and drives to the Derby in a dog-cart; and usually there seemed to be nothing on his mind except the vagaries of the weather, concerning which he was a great conversationalist. But now moodiness had claimed him for its own. After a short and melancholy “Good morning,” he turned to the task of measuring out the tobacco in silence.

Archie’s sympathetic nature was perturbed.

“What’s the matter, laddie?” he enquired. “You would seem to be feeling a bit of an onion this bright morning, what, yes, no? I can see it with the naked eye.”

Mr. Blake grunted sorrowfully.

“I’ve had a knock, Mr. Moffam.”

“Tell me all, friend of my youth.”

Mr. Blake, with a jerk of his thumb, indicated a poster which hung on the wall behind the counter. Archie had noticed it as he came in, for it was designed to attract the eye. It was printed in black letters on a yellow ground, and ran as follows:

CLOVER-LEAF SOCIAL OUTING CLUB GRAND CONTEST
PIE-EATING CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WEST SIDE

SPIKE O'DOWD
(Champion)

v.

BLAKE'S UNKNOWN

FOR A PURSE OF \$50 AND SIDE-BET

Archie examined this document gravely. It conveyed nothing to him except—what he had long suspected—that his sporting-looking friend had sporting blood as well as that kind of exterior. He expressed a kindly hope that the other’s Unknown would bring home the bacon.

Mr. Blake laughed one of those hollow, mirthless laughs.

“There ain’t any blooming Unknown,” he said, bitterly. This man had plainly suffered. “Yesterday, yes, but not now.”

Archie sighed.

“In the midst of life—— Dead?” he enquired, delicately.

“As good as,” replied the stricken tobacconist. He cast aside his artificial restraint and became voluble. Archie was one of

those sympathetic souls in whom even strangers readily confided their most intimate troubles. He was to those in travail of spirit very much what cat-nip is to a cat. "It's 'ard, sir, it's blooming 'ard! I'd got the event all sewed up in a parcel, and now this young feller-me-lad 'as to give me the knock. This lad of mine—sort of cousin 'e is; comes from London, like you and me—'as always 'ad, ever since he landed in this country, a most amazing knack of stowing away grub. 'E'd been a bit underfed these last two or three years over in the old country, what with food restrictions and all, and 'e took to the food over 'ere amazing. I'd 'ave backed 'im against a ruddy orstridge! Orstridge! I'd 'ave backed 'im against 'arf a dozen orstridges—take 'em on one after the other in the same ring on the same evening—and given 'em a handicap, too! 'E was a jewel, that boy. I've seen him polish off four pounds of steak and mealy potatoes and then look round kind of wolfish, as much as to ask when dinner was going to begin! That's the kind of a lad 'e was till this very morning. 'E would have out-swallowed this 'ere O'Dowd without turning a hair, as a relish before 'is tea! I'd got a couple of 'undred dollars on 'im, and thought myself lucky to get the odds. And now——"

Mr. Blake relapsed into a tortured silence.

"But what's the matter with the blighter? Why can't he go over the top? Has he got indigestion?"

"Indigestion?" Mr. Blake laughed another of his hollow laughs. "You couldn't give that boy indigestion if you fed 'im on safety-razor blades. Religion's more like what 'e's got."

"Religion?"

"Well, you can call it that. Seems last night, instead of goin' and resting 'is mind at a picture-palace like I told him to, 'e sneaked off to some sort of a lecture down on Eighth Avenue. 'E said 'e'd seen a piece about it in the papers, and it was about Rational Eating, and that kind of attracted 'im. 'E sort of thought 'e might pick up a few hints, like. 'E didn't know what rational eating was, but it sounded to 'im as if it must be something to do with food, and 'e didn't want to miss it. 'E came in here just now," said Mr. Blake, dully, "and 'e was a changed lad! Scared to death 'e was! Said the way 'e'd been goin' on in the past, it was a wonder 'e'd got any stummick left! It was a lady that give the lecture, and this boy said it was amazing what she told 'em about blood-pressure and things 'e didn't even know 'e 'ad. She showed 'em pictures, coloured pictures, of what 'appens inside the injudicious eater's

stummick who doesn't chew his food, and it was like a battlefield! 'E said 'e would no more think of eatin' a lot of pie than 'e would of shootin' 'imself, and anyhow eating pie would be a quicker death. I reasoned with 'im, Mr. Moffam, with tears in my eyes. I asked 'im was he goin' to chuck away fame and wealth just because a woman who didn't know what she was talking about had shown him a lot of faked pictures. But there wasn't any doin' anything with him. 'E give me the knock and 'opped it down the street to buy nuts." Mr. Blake moaned. "Two 'undred dollars and more gone pop, not to talk of the fifty dollars 'e would have won and me to get twenty-five of!"

Archie took his tobacco and walked pensively back to the hotel. He was fond of Jno. Blake, and grieved for the trouble that had come upon him. It was odd, he felt, how things seemed to link themselves up together. The woman who had delivered the fateful lecture to injudicious eaters could not be other than the mother of his young guest of last night. An uncomfortable woman! Not content with starving her own family——

Archie stopped in his tracks. A pedestrian, walking behind him, charged into his back, but Archie paid no attention. He had had one of those sudden, luminous ideas, which help a man who does not do much thinking as a rule to restore his average. He stood there for a moment, almost dizzy at the brilliance of his thoughts; then hurried on. Napoleon, he mused as he walked, must have felt like this after thinking up a hot one to spring on the enemy.

As if Destiny were suiting her plans to his, one of the first persons he saw as he entered the lobby of the Cosmopolis was the long boy. He was standing at the bookstall, reading as much of a morning paper as could be read free under the vigilant eyes of the presiding girl. Both he and she were observing the unwritten rules which govern these affairs—to wit, that you may read without interference as much as can be read without touching the paper. If you touch the paper, you lose, and have to buy.

"Well, well, well!" said Archie. "Here we are again, what!" He prodded the boy amiably in the lower ribs. "You're just the chap I was looking for. Got anything on for the time being?"

The boy said he had no engagements.

"Then I want you to stagger round with me to a chappie I know on Sixth Avenue. It's only a couple of blocks away. I think I can do you a bit of good. Put you on to something tolerably ripe,

if you know what I mean. Trickle along, laddie. You don't need a hat."

They found Mr. Blake brooding over his troubles in an empty shop.

"Cheer up, old thing!" said Archie. "The relief expedition has arrived." He directed his companion's gaze to the poster. "Cast your eye over that. How does that strike you?"

The long boy scanned the poster. A gleam appeared in his rather dull eye.

"Well?"

"Some people have all the luck!" said the long boy, feelingly.

"Would you like to compete, what?"

The boy smiled a sad smile. "Would I! Would I! Say! . . ."

"I know," interrupted Archie. "Wake you up in the night and ask you! I knew I could rely on you, old thing." He turned to Mr. Blake. "Here's the fellow you've been wanting to meet. The finest left-and-right-hand eater east of the Rockies! He'll fight the good fight for you."

Mr. Blake's English training had not been wholly overcome by residence in New York. He still retained a nice eye for the distinctions of class.

"But this young gentleman's a young gentleman," he urged, doubtfully, yet with hope shining in his eye. "He wouldn't do it."

"Of course, he would. Don't be ridic, old thing."

"Wouldn't do what?" asked the boy.

"Why, save the old homestead by taking on the champion. Dashed sad case, between ourselves! This poor egg's nominee has given him the raspberry at the eleventh hour, and only you can save him. And you owe it to him to do something, you know, because it was your jolly old mater's lecture last night that made the nominee quit. You must charge in and take his place. Sort of poetic justice, don't you know, and what not!" He turned to Mr. Blake. "When is the conflict supposed to start? Two-thirty? You haven't any important engagement for two-thirty, have you?"

"No. Mother's lunching at some ladies' club, and giving a lecture afterwards. I can slip away."

Archie patted his head.

"Then leg it where glory waits you, old bean!"

The long boy was gazing earnestly at the poster. It seemed to fascinate him. "Pie!" he said in a hushed voice.

The word was like a battle-cry.

CHAPTER XXII

WASHY STEPS INTO THE HALL OF FAME

AT about nine o'clock next morning, in a suite at the Hotel Cosmopolis, Mrs. Cora Bates McCall, the eminent lecturer on Rational Eating, was seated at breakfast with her family. Before her sat Mr. McCall, a little hunted-looking man, the natural peculiarities of whose face were accentuated by a pair of glasses of semicircular shape, like half-moons with the horns turned up. Behind these, Mr. McCall's eyes played a perpetual game of peekaboo, now peering over them, anon ducking down and hiding behind them. He was sipping a cup of anti-caffeine. On his right, toying listlessly with a plateful of cereal, sat his son, Washington. Mrs. McCall herself was eating a slice of Health Bread and nut butter. For she practised as well as preached the doctrines which she had striven for so many years to inculcate in an unthinking populace. Her day always began with a light but nutritious breakfast, at which a peculiarly uninviting cereal, which looked and tasted like an old straw hat that had been run through a meat chopper, competed for first place in the dislike of her husband and son with a more than usually offensive brand of imitation coffee. Mr. McCall was inclined to think that he loathed the imitation coffee rather more than the cereal, but Washington held strong views on the latter's superior ghastliness. Both Washington and his father, however, would have been fair-minded enough to admit that it was a close thing.

Mrs. McCall regarded her offspring with grave approval.

"I am glad to see, Lindsay," she said to her husband, whose eyes sprang dutifully over the glass fence as he heard his name, "that Washy has recovered his appetite. When he refused his dinner last night, I was afraid that he might be sickening for something. Especially as he had quite a flushed look. You noticed his flushed look?"

"He did look flushed."

"Very flushed. And his breathing was almost stertorous. And, when he said that he had no appetite, I am bound to say that I was anxious. But he is evidently perfectly well this morning. You do feel perfectly well this morning, Washy?"

The heir of the McCall's looked up from his cereal. He was a long, thin boy of about sixteen, with pale red hair, sandy eyelashes, and a long neck.

"Uh-huh," he said.

Mrs. McCall nodded.

"Surely now you will agree, Lindsay, that a careful and rational diet is what a boy needs? Washy's constitution is superb. He has a remarkable stamina, and I attribute it entirely to my careful supervision of his food. I shudder when I think of the growing boys who are permitted by irresponsible people to devour meat, candy, pie——" She broke off. "What is the matter, Washy?"

It seemed that the habit of shuddering at the thought of pie ran in the McCall family, for at the mention of the word a kind of internal shimmy had convulsed Washington's lean frame, and over his face there had come an expression that was almost one of pain. He had been reaching out his hand for a slice of Health Bread, but now he withdrew it rather hurriedly and sat back breathing hard.

"I'm all right," he said, huskily.

"Pie," proceeded Mrs. McCall, in her platform voice. She stopped again abruptly. "Whatever is the matter, Washington? You are making me feel nervous."

"I'm all right."

Mrs. McCall had lost the thread of her remarks. Moreover, having now finished her breakfast, she was inclined for a little light reading. One of the subjects allied to the matter of dietary on which she felt deeply was the question of reading at meals. She was of the opinion that the strain on the eye, coinciding with the strain on the digestion, could not fail to give the latter the short end of the contest; and it was a rule at her table that the morning paper should not even be glanced at till the conclusion of the meal. She said that it was upsetting to begin the day by reading the paper, and events were to prove that she was occasionally right.

All through breakfast the *New York Chronicle* had been lying neatly folded beside her plate. She now opened it, and, with a remark about looking for the report of her yesterday's lecture at the Butterfly Club, directed her gaze at the front page, on which she hoped that an editor with the best interests of the public at heart had decided to place her.

Mr. McCall, jumping up and down behind his glasses, scrutinised her face closely as she began to read. He always did this on these occasions, for none knew better than he that his comfort for the day depended largely on some unknown reporter whom he had never met. If this unseen individual had done his work properly and as befitted the importance of his subject, Mrs. McCall's mood for the next twelve hours would be as uniformly sunny as it was possible for it to be. But sometimes the fellows scamped their job disgracefully; and once, on a day which lived in Mr. McCall's memory, they had failed to make a report at all.

To-day, he noted with relief, all seemed to be well. The report actually was on the front page, an honour rarely accorded to his wife's utterances. Moreover, judging from the time it took her to read the thing, she had evidently been reported at length.

"Good, my dear?" he ventured. "Satisfactory?"

"Eh?" Mrs. McCall smiled meditatively. "Oh, yes, excellent. They have used my photograph, too. Not at all badly reproduced."

"Splendid!" said Mr. McCall.

Mrs. McCall gave a sharp shriek, and the paper fluttered from her hand.

"My dear!" said Mr. McCall, with concern.

His wife had recovered the paper, and was reading with burning eyes. A bright wave of colour had flowed over her masterful features. She was breathing as stertorously as ever her son Washington had done on the previous night.

"Washington!"

A basilisk glare shot across the table and turned the long boy to stone—all except his mouth, which opened feebly.

"Washington! Is this true?"

Washy closed his mouth, then let it slowly open again.

"My dear!" Mr. McCall's voice was alarmed. "What is it?" His eyes had climbed up over his glasses and remained there. "What is the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong! Read for yourself!"

Mr. McCall was completely mystified. He could not even formulate a guess at the cause of the trouble. That it appeared to concern his son Washington seemed to be the one solid fact at his disposal, and that only made the matter still more puzzling. Where, Mr. McCall asked himself, did Washington come in?

He looked at the paper, and received immediate enlightenment. Headlines met his eyes:

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

GOOD STUFF IN THIS BOY.

ABOUT A TON OF IT.

SON OF CORA BATES McCALL FAMOUS FOOD-REFORM LECTURER WINS PIE-EATING CHAMPIONSHIP OF WEST SIDE

There followed a lyrical outburst. So uplifted had the reporter evidently felt by the importance of his news that he had been unable to confine himself to prose:—

My children, if you fail to shine or triumph in your special line; if, let us say, your hopes are bent on some day being President, and folks ignore your proper worth, and say you've not a chance on earth—Cheer up! for in these stirring days Fame may be won in many ways. Consider, when your spirits fall, the case of Washington McCall.

Yes, cast your eye on Washy, please! He looks just like a piece of cheese: he's not a brilliant sort of chap: he has a dull and vacant map: his eyes are blank, his face is red, his ears stick out beside his head. In fact, to end these compliments, he would be dear at thirty cents. Yet Fame has welcomed to her Hall this selfsame Washington McCall.

His mother (*née* Miss Cora Bates) is one who frequently orates upon the proper kind of food which every menu should include. With eloquence the world she weans from chops and steaks and pork and beans. Such horrid things she'd like to crush, and make us live on milk and mush. But oh! the thing that makes her sigh is when she sees us eating pie. (We heard her lecture last July upon "The Nation's Menace—Pie.") Alas, the hit it made was small with Master Washington McCall.

For yesterday we took a trip to see the great Pie Championships, where men with bulging cheeks and eyes consume vast quantities of pies. A fashionable West Side crowd beheld the champion, Spike O'Dowd, endeavour to defend his throne against an upstart, Blake's Unknown. He wasn't an Unknown at all. He was young Washington McCall.

We freely own we'd give a leg if we could borrow, steal, or beg the skill old Homer used to show. (He wrote the *Iliad*, you know.) Old Homer swung a wicked pen, but we are ordinary men, and cannot even start to dream of doing justice to our theme. The subject of that great repast is too magnificent and vast. We can't describe (or even try) the way those rivals wolfed their pie. Enough to say that, when for hours each had extended all his pow'rs, toward the quiet evenfall O'Dowd succumbed to young McCall.

The champion was a willing lad. He gave the public all he had. His was a genuine fighting soul. He'd lots of speed and much control. No yellow streak did he evince. He tackled apple-pie and mince. This was the motto on his shield—"O'Dowds may burst. They never yield." His eyes began to start and roll. He eased his belt another hole. Poor fellow! With a single glance one saw that he had not a chance. A python would have had to crawl and own defeat from young McCall.

At last, long last, the finish came. His features overcast with shame,

O'Dowd, who'd faltered once or twice, declined to eat another slice. He tottered off, and kindly men rallied around with oxygen. But Washy, Cora Bates's son, seemed disappointed it was done. He somehow made those present feel he'd barely started on his meal. We asked him, "Aren't you feeling bad?" "Me!" said the lion-hearted lad. "Lead me"—he started for the street—"where I can get a bite to eat!" Oh, what a lesson does it teach to all of us, that splendid speech! How better can the curtain fall on Master Washington McCall!

Mr. McCall read this epic through, then he looked at his son. He first looked at him over his glasses, then through his glasses, then over his glasses again, then through his glasses once more. A curious expression was in his eyes. If such a thing had not been so impossible, one would have said that his gaze had in it something of respect, of admiration, even of reverence.

"But how did they find out your name?" he asked, at length.

Mrs. McCall exclaimed impatiently.

"Is *that* all you have to say?"

"No, no, my dear, of course not, quite so. But the point struck me as curious."

"Wretched boy," cried Mrs. McCall, "were you insane enough to reveal your name?"

Washington wriggled uneasily. Unable to endure the piercing stare of his mother, he had withdrawn to the window, and was looking out with his back turned. But even there he could feel her eyes on the back of his neck.

"I didn't think it 'ud matter," he mumbled. "A fellow with tortoiseshell-rimmed specs asked me, so I told him. How was I to know——"

His stumbling defence was cut short by the opening of the door.

"Hallo-allo-allo! What ho! What ho!"

Archie was standing in the doorway, beaming ingratiatingly on the family.

The apparition of an entire stranger served to divert the lightning of Mrs. McCall's gaze from the unfortunate Washy. Archie, catching it between the eyes, blinked and held on to the wall. He had begun to regret that he had yielded so weakly to Lucille's entreaty that he should look in on the McCalls and use the magnetism of his personality upon them in the hope of inducing them to settle the lawsuit. He wished, too, if the visit had to be paid that he had postponed it till after lunch, for he was never at his strongest in the morning. But Lucille had urged him to go now and get it over, and here he was.

"I think," said Mrs. McCall, icily, "that you must have mistaken your room."

Archie rallied his shaken forces.

"Oh, no. Rather not. Better introduce myself, what? My name's Moffam, you know. I'm old Brewster's son-in-law, and all that sort of rot, if you know what I mean." He gulped and continued. "I've come about this jolly old lawsuit, don't you know?"

Mr. McCall seemed about to speak, but his wife anticipated him.

"Mr. Brewster's attorneys are in communication with ours. We do not wish to discuss the matter."

Archie took an uninvited seat, eyed the Health Bread on the breakfast table for a moment with frank curiosity, and resumed his discourse.

"No, but I say, you know! I'll tell you what happened. I hate to totter in where I'm not wanted and all that, but my wife made such a point of it. Rightly or wrongly she regards me as a bit of a hound in the diplomacy line, and she begged me to look you up and see whether we couldn't do something about settling the jolly old thing. I mean to say, you know, the old bird—old Brewster, you know—is considerably perturbed about the affair—hates the thought of being in a posish where he has either got to bite his old pal McCall in the neck or be bitten by him—and—well, and so forth, don't you know! How about it?" He broke off. "Great Scot! I say, what!"

So engrossed had he been in his appeal that he had not observed the presence of the pie-eating champion, between whom and himself a large potted plant intervened. But now Washington, hearing the familiar voice, had moved from the window and was confronting him with an accusing stare.

"*He* made me do it!" said Washy, with the stern joy a sixteen-year-old boy feels when he sees somebody on to whose shoulders he can shift trouble from his own. "That's the fellow who took me to the place!"

"What are you talking about, Washington?"

"I'm telling you! He got me into the thing."

"Do you mean this—this——" Mrs. McCall shuddered. "Are you referring to this pie-eating contest?"

"You bet I am!"

"Is this true?" Mrs. McCall glared stonily at Archie. "Was it you who lured my poor boy into that—that——"

"Oh, absolutely. The fact is, don't you know, a dear old pal of mine who runs a tobacco shop on Sixth Avenue was rather in the soup. He had backed a chappie against the champion, and the chappie was converted by one of your lectures and swore off pie at the eleventh hour. Dashed hard luck on the poor chap, don't you know! And then I got the idea that our little friend here was the one to step in and save the situash, so I broached the matter to him. And I'll tell you one thing," said Archie, handsomely, "I don't know what sort of a capacity the original chappie had, but I'll bet he wasn't in your son's class. Your son has to be seen to be believed! Absolutely! You ought to be proud of him!" He turned in friendly fashion to Washy. "Rummy we should meet again like this! Never dreamed I should find you here. And, by Jove, it's absolutely marvellous how fit you look after yesterday. I had a sort of idea you would be groaning on a bed of sickness and all that."

There was a strange gurgling sound in the background. It resembled something getting up steam. And this, curiously enough, is precisely what it was. The thing that was getting up steam was Mr. Lindsay McCall.

The first effect of the Washy revelations on Mr. McCall had been merely to stun him. It was not until the arrival of Archie that he had had leisure to think; but since Archie's entrance he had been thinking rapidly and deeply.

For many years Mr. McCall had been in a state of suppressed revolution. He had smouldered, but had not dared to blaze. But this startling upheaval of his fellow-sufferer, Washy, had acted upon him like a high explosive. There was a strange gleam in his eye, a gleam of determination. He was breathing hard.

"Washy!"

His voice had lost its deprecating mildness. It rang strong and clear.

"Yes, pop?"

"How many pies did you eat yesterday?"

Washy considered.

"A good few."

"Now many? Twenty?"

"More than that. I lost count. A good few."

"And you feel as well as ever?"

"I feel fine."

Mr. McCall dropped his glasses. He glowered for a moment at the breakfast table. His eye took in the Health Bread, the imitation coffee-pot, the cereal, the nut-butter. Then with a swift movement he seized the cloth, jerked it forcibly, and brought the entire contents rattling and crashing to the floor.

"Lindsay!"

Mr. McCall met his wife's eye with quiet determination. It was plain that something had happened in the hinterland of Mr. McCall's soul.

"Cora," he said, resolutely, "I have come to a decision. I've been letting you run things your own way a little too long in this family. I'm going to assert myself. For one thing, I've had all I want of this food-reform foolery. Look at Washy! Yesterday that boy seems to have consumed anything from a couple of hundred-weight to a ton of pie, and he has thriven on it! Thriven! I don't want to hurt your feelings, Cora, but Washington and I have drunk our last cup of anti-caffeine! If you care to go on with the stuff, that's your look-out. But Washy and I are through."

He silenced his wife with a masterful gesture and turned to Archie. "And there's another thing. I never liked the idea of that lawsuit, but I let you talk me into it. Now I'm going to do things my way. Mr. Moffam, I'm glad you looked in this morning. I'll do just what you want. Take me to Dan Brewster now, and let's call the thing off, and shake hands on it."

"Are you mad, Lindsay?"

It was Cora Bates McCall's last shot. Mr. McCall paid no attention to it. He was shaking hands with Archie.

"I consider you, Mr. Moffam," he said, "the most sensible young man I have ever met!"

Archie blushed modestly.

"Awfully good of you, old bean," he said. "I wonder if you'd mind telling my jolly old father-in-law that? It'll be a bit of news for him!"

CHAPTER XXIII

MOTHER'S KNEE

ARCHIE MOFFAM'S connection with that devastatingly popular ballad, "Mother's Knee," was one to which he always looked back later with a certain pride. "Mother's Knee," it will be remembered, went through the world like a pestilence. Scots elders hummed it on their way to kirk; cannibals crooned it to their offspring in the jungles of Borneo; it was a best-seller among the Bolsheviks. In the United States alone three million copies were disposed of. For a man who has not accomplished anything outstandingly great in his life, it is something to have been in a sense responsible for a song like that; and, though there were moments when Archie experienced some of the emotions of a man who has punched a hole in the dam of one of the larger reservoirs, he never really regretted his share in the launching of the thing.

It seems almost bizarre now to think that there was a time when even one person in the world had not heard "Mother's Knee"; but it came fresh to Archie one afternoon some weeks after the episode of Washy, in his suite at the Hotel Cosmopolis, where he was cementing with cigarettes and pleasant conversation his renewed friendship with Wilson Hymack, whom he had first met in the neighbourhood of Armentières during the war.

"What are you doing these days?" enquired Wilson Hymack.

"Me?" said Archie. "Well, as a matter of fact, there is what you might call a sort or species of lull in my activities at the moment. But, my jolly old father-in-law is bustling about running up a new hotel a bit farther down-town, and the scheme is for me to be manager when it's finished. From what I have seen in this place, it's a simple sort of job, and I fancy I shall be somewhat hot stuff. How are you filling in the long hours?"

"I'm in my uncle's office, darn it!"

"Starting at the bottom and learning the business and all that? A noble pursuit, no doubt, but I'm bound to say it would give me the pip in no uncertain manner."

"It gives me," said Wilson Hymack, "a pain in the thorax. I want to be a composer."

"A composer, eh?"

Archie felt that he should have guessed this. The chappie had a distinctly artistic look. He wore a bow-tie and all that sort of thing. His trousers bagged at the knees, and his hair, which during the martial epoch of his career had been pruned to the roots, fell about his ears in luxuriant disarray.

"Say! Do you want to hear the best thing I've ever done?"

"Indubitably," said Archie, politely. "Carry on, old bird!"

"I wrote the lyric as well as the melody," said Wilson Hymack, who had already seated himself at the piano. "It's got the greatest title you ever heard. It's a lallapaloosa! It's called 'It's a Long Way Back to Mother's Knee.' How's that? Poor, eh?"

Archie expelled a smoke-ring doubtfully.

"Isn't it a little stale?"

"Stale? What do you mean, stale? There's always room for another song boosting mother."

"Oh, is it boosting mother?" Archie's face cleared. "I thought it was a hit at the short skirts. Why, of course, that makes all the difference. In that case, I see no reason why it should not be ripe, fruity, and pretty well all to the mustard. Let's have it."

Wilson Hymack pushed as much of his hair out of his eyes as he could reach with one hand, cleared his throat, looked dreamily over the top of the piano at a photograph of Archie's father-in-law, Mr. Daniel Brewster, played a prelude, and began to sing in a weak, high, composer's voice. All composers sing exactly alike, and they have to be heard to be believed.

"One night a young man wandered through the glitter of Broadway: His money he had squandered. For a meal he couldn't pay."

"Tough luck!" murmured Archie, sympathetically.

"He thought about the village where his boyhood he had spent, And yearned for all the simple joys with which he'd been content."

"The right spirit!" said Archie, with approval. "I'm beginning to like this chappie!"

"Don't interrupt!"

"Oh, right-o! Carried away and all that!"

"He looked upon the city so frivolous and gay: And, as he heaved a weary sigh, these words he then did say:—

INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE

It's a long way back to mother's knee,
mother's knee,
mother's knee:

It's a long way back to mother's knee,
Where I used to stand and prattle
With my teddy-bear and rattle:

Oh, those childhood days in Tennessee,
They sure look good to me!

It's a long, long way, but I'm gonna start to-day!

I'm going back,
Believe me, oh!

I'm going back
(I want to go!)

I'm going back—back—on the seven-three
To the dear old shack where I used to be!
I'm going back to mother's knee!"

Wilson Hymack's voice cracked on the final high note, which was of an altitude beyond his powers. He turned with a modest cough.

"That'll give you an idea of it!"

"It has, old thing, it has!"

"Is it or is it not a ball of fire?"

"It has many of the earmarks of a sound egg," admitted Archie. "Of course——"

"Of course, it wants singing."

"Just what I was going to suggest."

"It wants a woman to sing it. A woman who could reach out for that last high note and teach it to take a joke. The whole refrain is working up to that. You need Tetrizzini or someone who would just pick that note off the roof and hold it till the janitor came round to lock up the building for the night."

"I must buy a copy for my wife. Where can I get it?"

"You can't get it! It isn't published. Writing music's the darndest job!" Wilson Hymack snorted fiercely. It was plain that the man was pouring out the pent-up emotion of many days. "You write the biggest thing in years and you go round trying to get someone to sing it, and they say you're a genius and then shove the song away in a drawer and forget about it."

Archie lit another cigarette.

"I'm a jolly old child in these matters, old lad," he said, "but why don't you take it direct to a publisher? As a matter of fact, if it would be any use to you, I was foregathering with a music-publisher only the other day. A bird of the name of Blumenthal.

He was lunching in here with a pal of mine, and we got tolerably matey. Why not let me tool you round to the office to-morrow and play it to him?"

"No thanks. Much obliged, but I'm not going to play that melody in any publisher's office with his hired gang of Tin-Pan Alley composers listening at the keyhole and taking notes. I'll have to wait till I can find somebody to sing it. Well, I must be going along. Glad to have seen you again. Sooner or later I'll take you to hear that high note sung by someone in a way that'll make your spine tie itself in knots round the back of your neck."

"I'll count the days," said Archie, courteously. "Pip-pip!"

Hardly had the door closed behind the composer when it opened again to admit Lucille.

"Hallo, light of my soul!" said Archie, rising and embracing his wife. "Where have you been all the afternoon? I was expecting you this many an hour past. I wanted you to meet——"

"I've been having tea with a girl down in Greenwich Village. I couldn't get away before. Who was that who went out just as I came along the passage?"

"Chappie of the name of Hymack. I met him in France. A composer and what not."

"We seem to have been moving in artistic circles this afternoon. The girl I went to see is a singer. At least, she wants to sing, but gets no encouragement."

"Precisely the same with my bird. He wants to get his music sung but nobody'll sing it. But I didn't know you knew any Greenwich Village warblers, sunshine of my home. How did you meet this female?"

Lucille sat down and gazed forlornly at him with her big grey eyes. She was registering something, but Archie could not gather what it was.

"Archie, darling, when you married me you undertook to share my sorrows, didn't you?"

"Absolutely! It's all in the book of words. For better or for worse, in sickness and in health, all-down-set-'em-up-in-the-other-alley. Regular iron-clad contract!"

"Then share 'em!" said Lucille. "Bill's in love again!"

Archie blinked.

"Bill? When you say Bill, do you mean Bill? Your brother

Bill? My brother-in-law Bill? Jolly old William, the son and heir of the Brewsters?"

"I do."

"You say he's in love? Cupid's dart?"

"Even so!"

"But, I say! Isn't this rather—— What I mean to say is, the lad's an absolute scourge! The Great Lover, what! Also ran, Brigham Young, and all that sort of thing! Why, it's only a few weeks ago that he was moaning brokenly about that vermilion-haired female who subsequently hooked on to old Reggie van Tuyl!"

"She's a little better than that girl, thank goodness. All the same, I don't think father will approve."

"Of what calibre is the latest exhibit?"

"Well, she comes from the Middle West, and seems to be trying to be twice as Bohemian as the rest of the girls down in Greenwich Village. She wears her hair bobbed and goes about in a kimono. She's probably read magazine stories about Greenwich Village, and has modelled herself on them. It's so silly, when you can see Hicks Corners sticking out of her all the time."

"That one got past me before I could grab it. What did you say she had sticking out of her?"

"I meant that anybody could see that she came from somewhere out in the wilds. As a matter of fact, Bill tells me that she was brought up in Snake Bite, Michigan."

"Snake Bite? What rummy names you have in America! Still, I'll admit there's a village in England called Nether Wallop, so who am I to cast the first stone? How is old Bill? Pretty feverish?"

"He says this time it is the real thing."

"That's what they all say! I wish I had a dollar for every time—— Forgotten what I was going to say!" broke off Archie, prudently. "So you think," he went on, after a pause, "that William's latest is going to be one more shock for the old dad?"

"I can't imagine father approving of her."

"I've studied your merry old progenitor pretty closely," said Archie, "and, between you and me, I can't imagine him approving of anybody!"

"I can't understand why it is that Bill goes out of his way to pick these horrors. I know at least twenty delightful girls, all pretty and with lots of money, who would be just the thing for him; but he sneaks away and goes falling in love with someone

impossible. And the worst of it is that one always feels one's got to do one's best to see him through."

"Absolutely! One doesn't want to throw a spanner into the works of Love's young dream. It behoves us to rally round. Have you heard this girl sing?"

"Yes. She sang this afternoon."

"What sort of a voice has she got?"

"Well, it's—loud!"

"Could she pick a high note off the roof and hold it till the janitor came round to lock up the building for the night?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Answer me this, woman, frankly. How is her high note? Pretty lofty?"

"Why, yes."

"Then say no more," said Archie. "Leave this to me, my dear old better four-fifths! Hand the whole thing over to Archibald, the man who never lets you down. I have a scheme!"

As Archie approached his suite on the following afternoon he heard through the closed door the drone of a gruff male voice; and, going in, discovered Lucille in the company of his brother-in-law. Lucille, Archie thought, was looking a trifle fatigued. Bill, on the other hand, was in great shape. His eyes were shining, and his face looked so like that of a stuffed frog that Archie had no difficulty in gathering that he had been lecturing on the subject of his latest enslaver.

"Hallo, Bill, old crumpet!" he said.

"Hallo, Archie!"

"I'm so glad you've come," said Lucille. "Bill is telling me all about Spectatia."

"Who?"

"Spectatia. The girl, you know. Her name is Spectatia Huskisson."

"It can't be!" said Archie, incredulously.

"Why not?" growled Bill.

"Well, how could it?" said Archie, appealing to him as a reasonable man. "I mean to say! Spectatia Huskisson! I gravely doubt whether there is such a name."

"What's wrong with it?" demanded the incensed Bill. "It's a darned sight better name than Archibald Moffam."

"Don't fight, you two children!" intervened Lucille, firmly.

"It's a good old Middle West name. Everybody knows the Huskissons of Snake Bite, Michigan. Besides, Bill calls her Tootles."

"Pootles," corrected Bill, austere.

"Oh, yes, Pootles. He calls her Pootles."

"Young blood! Young blood!" sighed Archie.

"I wish you wouldn't talk as if you were my grandfather."

"I look on you as a son, laddie, a favourite son!"

"If I had a father like you——!"

"Ah, but you haven't, young-feller-me-lad, and that's the trouble. If you had, everything would be simple. But as your actual father, if you'll allow me to say so, is one of the finest specimens of the human vampire-bat in captivity, something has got to be done about it, and you're dashed lucky to have me in your corner, a guide, philosopher, and friend, full of the fruitiest ideas. Now, if you'll kindly listen to me for a moment——"

"I've been listening to you ever since you came in."

"You wouldn't speak in that harsh tone of voice if you knew all! William, I have a scheme!"

"Well?"

"The scheme to which I allude is what Maeterlinck would call a lallapaloosa!"

"What a little marvel he is!" said Lucille, regarding her husband affectionately. "He eats a lot of fish, Bill. That's what makes him so clever!"

"Shrimps!" diagnosed Bill, churlishly.

"Do you know the leader of the orchestra in the restaurant downstairs?" asked Archie, ignoring the slur.

"I know there *is* a leader of the orchestra. What about him?"

"A sound fellow. Great pal of mine. I've forgotten his name——"

"Call him Pootles!" suggested Lucille.

"Desist!" said Archie, as a wordless growl proceeded from his stricken brother-in-law. "Temper your hilarity with a modicum of reserve. This girlish frivolity is unseemly. Well, I'm going to have a chat with this chappie and fix it all up."

"Fix what up?"

"The whole jolly business. I'm going to kill two birds with one stone. I've a composer chappie popping about in the background whose one ambish is to have his pet song sung before a discriminating audience. You have a singer straining at the leash. I'm going to arrange with this egg who leads the orchestra that

your female shall sing my chappie's song downstairs one night during dinner. How about it? Is it or is it not a ball of fire?"

"It's not a bad idea," admitted Bill, brightening visibly. "I wouldn't have thought you had it in you."

"Why not?"

"Well——"

"It's a capital idea," said Lucille. "Quite out of the question, of course."

"How do you mean?"

"Don't you know that the one thing father hates more than anything else in the world is anything like a cabaret? People are always coming to him, suggesting that it would brighten up the dinner hour if he had singers and things, and he crushes them into little bits. He thinks there's nothing that lowers the tone of a place more. He'll bite you in three places when you suggest it to him!"

"Ah! But has it escaped your notice, lighting system of my soul, that the dear old dad is not at present in residence? He went off to fish at Lake What's-its-name this morning."

"You aren't dreaming of doing this without asking him?"

"That was the general idea."

"But he'll be furious when he finds out."

"But will he find out? I ask you, will he?"

"Of course he will."

"I don't see why he should," said Bill, on whose plastic mind the plan had made a deep impression.

"He won't," said Archie, confidently. "This wheeze is for one night only. By the time the jolly old gov'nor returns, bitten to the bone by mosquitoes, with one small stuffed trout in his suit-case, everything will be over and all quiet once more along the Potomac. The scheme is this. My chappie wants his song heard by a publisher. Your girl wants her voice heard by one of the blighters who get up concerts and all that sort of thing. No doubt you know such a bird, whom you could invite to the hotel for a bit of dinner?"

"I know Carl Steinburg. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of writing to him about Spectatia."

"You're absolutely sure that *is* her name?" said Archie, his voice still tinged with incredulity. "Oh, well, I suppose she told you so herself, and no doubt she knows best. That will be topping. Rope in your pal and hold him down at the table till the finish."

Lucille, the beautiful vision on the sky-line yonder, and I will be at another table entertaining Maxie Blumenthal."

"Who on earth is Maxie Blumenthal?" asked Lucille.

"One of my boyhood chums. A music-publisher. I'll get him to come along, and then we'll all be set. At the conclusion of the performance Miss——" Archie winced—"Miss Spectatia Huskisson will be signed up for a forty weeks' tour, and jovial old Blumenthal will be making all arrangements for publishing the song. Two birds, as I indicated before, with one stone! How about it?"

"It's a winner," said Bill.

"Of course," said Archie, "I'm not urging you. I merely make the suggestion. If you know a better 'ole, go to it!"

"It's terrific!" said Bill.

"It's absurd!" said Lucille.

"My dear old partner of joys and sorrows," said Archie, wounded, "we court criticism, but this is mere abuse. What seems to be the difficulty?"

"The leader of the orchestra would be afraid to do it."

"Ten dollars—supplied by William here—push it over, Bill, old man—will remove his tremors."

"And father's certain to find out."

"Am I afraid of father?" cried Archie, manfully. "Well, yes, I am!" he added, after a moment's reflection. "But I don't see how he can possibly get to know."

"Of course he can't," said Bill, decidedly. "Fix it up as soon as you can, Archie. This is what the doctor ordered."

THE MELTING OF MR CONNOLLEY

THE main dining-room of the Hotel Cosmopolis is a decorous place. The lighting is artistically dim, and the genuine old tapestries on the walls seem, with their mediaeval calm, to discourage any essay in the riotous. Soft-footed waiters shimmer to and fro over thick, expensive carpets to the music of an orchestra which abstains wholly from the noisy modernity of jazz. To Archie, who during the past few days had been privileged to hear Miss Huskisson rehearsing, the place had a sort of brooding quiet, like the ocean just before the arrival of a cyclone. As Lucille had said, Miss Huskisson's voice was loud. It was a powerful organ, and there was no doubt that it would take the cloistered stillness of the Cosmopolis dining-room and stand it on one ear. Almost unconsciously, Archie found himself bracing his muscles and holding his breath as he had done in France at the approach of the zero hour, when awaiting the first roar of a barrage. He listened mechanically to the conversation of Mr. Blumenthal.

The music-publisher was talking with some vehemence on the subject of Labour. A recent printers' strike had bitten deeply into Mr. Blumenthal's soul. The working man, he considered, was rapidly landing God's Country in the soup, and he had twice upset his glass with the vehemence of his gesticulation. He was an energetic right-and-left-hand talker.

"The more you give 'em the more they want!" he complained. "There's no pleasing 'em! It isn't only in my business. There's your father, Mrs. Moffam!"

"Good God! Where?" said Archie, starting.

"I say, take your father's case. He's doing all he knows to get this new hotel of his finished, and what happens? A man gets fired for loafing on his job, and Connolly calls a strike. The building operations are held up till the thing's settled! It isn't right!"

"It's a great shame," agreed Lucille. "I was reading about it in the paper this morning."

"That man Connolly's a tough guy. You'd think, being a personal friend of your father, he would——"

"I didn't know they were friends."

"Been friends for years. But a lot of difference that makes. Out come the men just the same. It isn't right! I was saying it wasn't right!" repeated Mr. Blumenthal to Archie, for he was a man who liked the attention of every member of his audience.

Archie did not reply. He was staring glassily across the room at two men who had just come in. One was a large, stout, square-faced man of commanding personality. The other was Mr. Daniel Brewster.

Mr. Blumenthal followed his gaze.

"Why, there is Connolly coming in now!"

"Father!" gasped Lucille.

Her eyes met Archie's. Archie took a hasty drink of ice-water.

"This," he murmured, "has torn it!"

"Archie, you must do something!"

"I know! But what?"

"What's the trouble?" enquired Mr. Blumenthal, mystified.

"Go over to their table and talk to them," said Lucille.

"Me!" Archie quivered. "No, I say, old thing, really!"

"Get them away!"

"How do you mean?"

"I know!" cried Lucille, inspired. "Father promised that you should be manager of the new hotel when it was built. Well, then, this strike affects you just as much as anybody else. You have a perfect right to talk it over with them. Go and ask them to have dinner up in our suite where you can discuss it quietly. Say that up there they won't be disturbed by the—the music."

At this moment, while Archie wavered, hesitating like a diver on the edge of a springboard who is trying to summon up the necessary nerve to project himself into the deep, a bellboy approached the table where the Messrs. Brewster and Connolly had seated themselves. He murmured something in Mr. Brewster's ear, and the proprietor of the Cosmopolis rose and followed him out of the room.

"Quick! Now's your chance!" said Lucille, eagerly. "Father's been called to the telephone. Hurry!"

Archie took another drink of ice-water to steady his shaking nerve-centres, pulled down his waistcoat, straightened his tie, and then, with something of the air of a Roman gladiator entering the arena, tottered across the room. Lucille turned to entertain the perplexed music-publisher.

The nearer Archie got to Mr. Aloysius Connolly the less did he like the looks of him. Even at a distance the Labour leader had had a formidable aspect. Seen close to, he looked even more uninviting. His face had the appearance of having been carved out of granite, and the eye which collided with Archie's as the latter, with an attempt at an ingratiating smile, pulled up a chair and sat down at the table was hard and frosty. Mr. Connolly gave the impression that he would be a good man to have on your side during a rough-and-tumble fight down on the water-front or in some lumber-camp, but he did not look chummy.

"Hallo-allo-allo!" said Archie.

"Who the devil," inquired Mr. Connolly, "are you?"

"My name's Archibald Moffam."

"That's not my fault."

"I'm jolly old Brewster's son-in-law."

"Glad to meet you."

"Glad to meet *you*," said Archie, handsomely.

"Well, good-bye!" said Mr. Connolly.

"Eh?"

"Run along and sell your papers. Your father-in-law and I have business to discuss."

"Yes, I know."

"Private," added Mr. Connolly.

"Oh, but I'm in on this binge, you know. I'm going to be the manager of the new hotel."

"You!"

"Absolutely!"

"Well, well!" said Mr. Connolly, noncommittally.

Archie, pleased with the smoothness with which matters had opened, bent forward winsomely.

"I say, you know! It won't do, you know! Absolutely no! Not a bit like it! No, no, far from it! Well, how about it? How do we go? What? Yes? No?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Call it off, old thing!"

"Call what off?"

"This festive old strike."

"Not on your—hallo, Dan! Back again?"

Mr. Brewster, looming over the table like a thundercloud, regarded Archie with more than his customary hostility. Life was

no pleasant thing for the proprietor of the Cosmopolis just now. Once a man starts building hotels, the thing becomes like dram-drinking. Any hitch, any sudden cutting-off of the daily dose, has the worst effects; and the strike which was holding up the construction of his latest effort had plunged Mr. Brewster into a restless gloom. In addition to having this strike on his hands, he had had to abandon his annual fishing-trip just when he had begun to enjoy it; and, as if all this were not enough, here was his son-in-law sitting at his table. Mr. Brewster had a feeling that this was more than man was meant to bear.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Hallo, old thing!" said Archie. "Come and join the party!"

"Don't call me old thing!"

"Right-o, old companion, just as you say. I say, I was just going to suggest to Mr. Connolly that we should all go up to my suite and talk this business over quietly."

"He says he's the manager of your new hotel," said Mr. Connolly. "Is that right?"

"I suppose so," said Mr. Brewster, gloomily.

"Then I'm doing you a kindness," said Mr. Connolly, "in not letting it be built."

Archie dabbed at his forehead with his handkerchief. The moments were flying, and it began to seem impossible to shift these two men. Mr. Connolly was as firmly settled in his chair as some primeval rock. As for Mr. Brewster, he, too, had seated himself, and was gazing at Archie with a weary repulsion. Mr. Brewster's glance always made Archie feel as though there were soup on his shirt-front.

And suddenly from the orchestra at the other end of the room there came a familiar sound, the prelude of "Mother's Knee."

"So you've started a cabaret, Dan?" said Mr. Connolly, in a satisfied voice. "I always told you you were away behind the times here!"

Mr. Brewster jumped.

"Cabaret!"

He stared unbelievably at the white-robed figure which had just mounted the orchestra dais, and then concentrated his gaze on Archie.

Archie would not have looked at his father-in-law at this juncture if he had had a free and untrammelled choice; but Mr. Brewster's eye drew his with something of the fascination which

a snake's has for a rabbit. Mr. Brewster's eye was fiery and intimidating. A basilisk might have gone to him with advantage for a course of lessons. His gaze went right through Archie till the latter seemed to feel his back-hair curling crisply in the flames.

"Is this one of your fool-tricks?"

Even in this tense moment Archie found time almost unconsciously to admire his father-in-law's penetration and intuition. He seemed to have a sort of sixth sense. No doubt this was how great fortunes were made.

"Well, as a matter of fact—to be absolutely accurate—it was like this——"

"Say, cut it out!" said Mr. Connolly. "Can the chatter! I want to listen."

Archie was only too ready to oblige him. Conversation at the moment was the last thing he himself desired. He managed with a strong effort to disengage himself from Mr. Brewster's eye, and turned to the orchestra dais, where Miss Spectatia Huskisson was now beginning the first verse of Wilson Hymack's masterpiece.

Miss Huskisson, like so many of the female denizens of the Middle West, was tall and blonde and constructed on substantial lines. She was a girl whose appearance suggested the old homestead and fried pancakes and pop coming home to dinner after the morning's ploughing. Even her bobbed hair did not altogether destroy this impression. She looked big and strong and healthy, and her lungs were obviously good. She attacked the verse of the song with something of the vigour and breadth of treatment with which in other days she had reasoned with refractory mules. Her diction was the diction of one trained to call the cattle home in the teeth of Western hurricanes. Whether you wanted to or not, you heard every word.

The subdued clatter of knives and forks had ceased. The diners, unused to this sort of thing at the Cosmopolis, were trying to adjust their faculties to cope with the outburst. Waiters stood transfixed, frozen in attitudes of service. In the momentary lull between verse and refrain Archie could hear the deep breathing of Mr. Brewster. Involuntarily he turned to gaze at him once more, as refugees from Pompeii may have turned to gaze upon Vesuvius; and, as he did so, he caught sight of Mr. Connolly, and paused in astonishment.

Mr. Connolly was an altered man. His whole personality had

under gone a subtle change. His face still looked as though hewn from the living rock, but into his eyes had crept an expression which in another man might almost have been called sentimental. Incredible as it seemed to Archie, Mr. Connolly's eyes were dreamy. There was even in them a suggestion of unshed tears. And when with a vast culmination of sound Miss Huskisson reached the high note at the end of the refrain and, after holding it as some storming-party, spent but victorious, holds the summit of a hard-won redoubt, broke off suddenly, in the stillness which followed there proceeded from Mr. Connolly a deep sigh.

Miss Huskisson began the second verse. And Mr. Brewster, seeming to recover from some kind of a trance, leaped to his feet.

"Great Godfrey!"

"Sit down!" said Mr. Connolly, in a broken voice. "Sit down, Dan!"

"He went back to his mother on the train that very day:
He knew there was no other who could make him bright and gay:
He kissed her on the forehead and he whispered, 'I've come home!'
He told her he was never going any more to roam.
And onward through the happy years, till he grew old and grey,
He never once regretted those brave words he once did say:
It's a long way back to mother's knee—!"

The last high note screeched across the room like a shell, and the applause that followed was like a shell's bursting. One could hardly have recognised the refined interior of the Cosmopolis dining-room. Fair women were waving napkins; brave men were hammering on the tables with the butt-end of knives, for all the world as if they imagined themselves to be in one of those distressing midnight-revue places. Miss Huskisson bowed, retired, returned, bowed, and retired again, the tears streaming down her ample face. Over in a corner Archie could see his brother-in-law clapping strenuously. A waiter, with a display of manly emotions that did him credit, dropped an order of new peas.

"Thirty years ago last October," said Mr. Connolly, in a shaking voice, "I——"

Mr. Brewster interrupted him violently.

"I'll fire that orchestra-leader! He goes to-morrow! I'll fire——" He turned on Archie. "What the devil do you mean by it, you—you——"

"Thirty years ago," said Mr. Connolly, wiping away a tear with his napkin, "I left me dear old home in the old country——"

"My hotel a bear-garden!"

"Frightfully sorry and all that, old companion——"

"Thirty years ago last October! 'Twas a fine autumn evening, the finest ye'd ever wish to see. Me old mother, she came to the station to see me off."

Mr. Brewster, who was not deeply interested in Mr. Connolly's old mother, continued to splutter inarticulately, like a firework trying to go off.

"'Ye'll always be a good boy, Aloysius?' she said to me," said Mr. Connolly, proceeding with his autobiography. "And I said: 'Yes, mother, I will!' " Mr. Connolly sighed and applied the napkin again. "'Twas a liar I was!" he observed, remorsefully. "Many's the dirty I've played since then. 'It's a long way back to mother's knee.' 'Tis a true word!" He turned impulsively to Mr. Brewster. "Dan, there's a deal of trouble in this world without me going out of me way to make more. The strike is over! I'll send the men back to-morrow! There's me hand on it!"

Mr. Brewster, who had just managed to co-ordinate his views on the situation and was about to express them with the generous strength which was ever his custom when dealing with his son-in-law, checked himself abruptly. He stared at his old friend and business enemy, wondering if he could have heard aright. Hope began to creep back into Mr. Brewster's heart, like a shame-faced dog that has been away from home hunting for a day or two.

"You'll what!"

"I'll send the men back to-morrow! That song was sent to guide me, Dan! It was meant! Thirty years ago last October me dear old mother——"

Mr. Brewster bent forward attentively. His views on Mr. Connolly's dear old mother had changed. He wanted to hear all about her.

"'Twas that last note that girl sang brought it all back to me as if 'twas yesterday. As we waited on the platform, me old mother and I, out comes the train from the tunnel, and the engine lets off a screech the way ye'd hear it ten miles away. 'Twas thirty years ago——"

Archie stole softly from the table. He felt that his presence, if it had ever been required, was required no longer. Looking back, he could see his father-in-law patting Mr. Connolly affectionately on the shoulder.

Archie and Lucille lingered over their coffee. Mr. Blumenthal was out in the telephone-box settling the business end with Wilson Hymack. The music-publisher had been unstinted in his praise of "Mother's Knee." It was sure-fire, he said. The words, stated Mr. Blumenthal, were gooey enough to hurt, and the tune reminded him of every other song-hit he had ever heard. There was, in Mr. Blumenthal's opinion, nothing to stop the thing selling a million copies.

Archie smoked contentedly.

"Not a bad evening's work, old thing," he said. "Talk about birds with one stone!" He looked at Lucille reproachfully. "You don't seem bubbling over with joy."

"Oh, I am, precious!" Lucille sighed. "I was only thinking about Bill."

"What about Bill?"

"Well, it's rather awful to think of him tied for life to that—that steam-siren."

"Oh, we mustn't look on the jolly old dark side. Perhaps——Hallo, Bill, old top! We were just talking about you."

"Were you?" said Bill Brewster, in a dispirited voice.

"I take it that you want congratulations, what?"

"I want sympathy!"

"Sympathy?"

"Sympathy! And lots of it! She's gone!"

"Gone! Who?"

"Spectatia!"

"How do you mean, gone?"

Bill glowered at the tablecloth.

"Gone home. I've just seen her off in a cab. She's gone back to Washington Square to pack. She's catching the ten o'clock train back to Snake Bite. It was that damned song!" muttered Bill, in a stricken voice. "She says she never realised before she sang it to-night how hollow New York was. She said it suddenly came over her. She says she's going to give up her career and go back to her mother. What the deuce are you twiddling your fingers for?" he broke off, irritably.

"Sorry, old man. I was just counting."

"Counting? Counting what?"

"Birds, old thing. Only birds!" said Archie.

THE WIGMORE VENUS

THE morning was so brilliantly fine; the populace popped to and fro in so active and cheery a manner; and everybody appeared to be so absolutely in the pink, that a casual observer of the city of New York would have said that it was one of those happy days. Yet Archie Moffam, as he turned out of the sun-bathed street into the ramshackle building on the third floor of which was the studio belonging to his artist friend, James B. Wheeler, was faintly oppressed with a sort of a kind of feeling that something was wrong. He would not have gone so far as to say that he had the pip—it was more a vague sense of discomfort. And, searching for first causes as he made his way upstairs, he came to the conclusion that the person responsible for this nebulous depression was his wife, Lucille. It seemed to Archie that at breakfast that morning Lucille's manner had been subtly rummy. Nothing you could put your finger on, still—rummy.

Musing thus, he reached the studio, and found the door open and the room empty. It had the air of a room whose owner has dashed in to fetch his golf-clubs and biffed off, after the casual fashion of the artist temperament, without bothering to close up behind him. And such, indeed, was the case. The studio had seen the last of J. B. Wheeler for that day: but Archie, not realising this and feeling that a chat with Mr. Wheeler, who was a light-hearted bird, was what he needed this morning, sat down to wait. After a few moments, his gaze, straying over the room, encountered a handsomely framed picture, and he went across to take a look at it.

J. B. Wheeler was an artist who made a large annual income as an illustrator for the magazines, and it was a surprise to Archie to find that he also went in for this kind of thing. For the picture, dashingly painted in oils, represented a comfortably plump young woman who, from her rather weak-minded simper and the fact that she wore absolutely nothing except a small dove on the left shoulder, was plainly intended to be the goddess Venus. Archie was not much of a lad around the picture-galleries, but he knew enough about Art to recognise Venus when he saw her; though once or twice, it is true, artists had double-crossed him by ringing

in some such title as "Day Dreams," or "When the Heart is Young."

He inspected this picture for awhile, then, returning to his seat, lit a cigarette and began to meditate on Lucille once more. Yes, the dear girl had been rummy at breakfast. She had not exactly said anything or done anything out of the ordinary; but—well, you know how it is. We husbands, we lads of the for-better-or-for-worse brigade, we learn to pierce the mask. There had been in Lucille's manner that curious, strained sweetness which comes to women whose husbands have failed to match the piece of silk or forgotten to post an important letter. If his conscience had not been as clear as crystal, Archie would have said that that was what must have been the matter. But, when Lucille wrote letters, she just stepped out of the suite and dropped them in the mail-chute attached to the elevator. It couldn't be that. And he couldn't have forgotten anything else, because——

"Oh my sainted aunt!"

Archie's cigarette smouldered, neglected, between his fingers. His jaw had fallen and his eyes were staring glassily before him. He was appalled. His memory was weak, he knew; but never before had it let him down so scurvily as this. This was a record. It stood in a class by itself, printed in red ink and marked with a star, as the bloomer of a lifetime. For a man may forget many things: he may forget his name, his umbrella, his nationality, his spats, and the friends of his youth: but there is one thing which your married man, your in-sickness-and-in-health lizard must not forget: and that is the anniversary of his wedding-day.

Remorse swept over Archie like a wave. His heart bled for Lucille. No wonder the poor girl had been rummy at breakfast. What girl wouldn't be rummy at breakfast, tied for life to a ghastly outsider like himself? He groaned hollowly, and sagged forlornly in his chair: and, as he did so, the Venus caught his eye. For it was an eye-catching picture. You might like it or dislike it, but you could not ignore it.

As a strong swimmer shoots to the surface after a high dive. Archie's soul rose suddenly from the depths to which it had descended. He did not often get inspirations, but he got one now. Hope dawned with a jerk. The one way out had presented itself to him. A rich present! That was the wheeze. If he returned to her bearing a rich present, he might, with the help of Heaven and a face of brass, succeed in making her believe that he had merely

pretended to forget the vital date in order to enhance the surprise.

It was a scheme. Like some great general forming his plan of campaign on the eve of battle, Archie had the whole binge neatly worked out inside a minute. He scribbled a note to Mr. Wheeler, explaining the situation and promising reasonable payment on the instalment system; then, placing the note in a conspicuous position on the easel, he leaped to the telephone: and presently found himself connected with Lucille's room at the Cosmopolis.

"Hullo, darling," he cooed.

There was a slight pause at the other end of the wire.

"Oh, hullo, Archie!"

Lucille's voice was dull and listless, and Archie's experienced ear could detect that she had been crying. He raised his right foot, and kicked himself indignantly on the left ankle.

"Many happy returns of the day, old thing!"

A muffled sob floated over the wire.

"Have you only just remembered?" said Lucille in a small voice.

Archie, bracing himself up, cackled gleefully into the receiver.

"Did I take you in, light of my home? Do you mean to say you really thought I had forgotten? For Heaven's sake!"

"You didn't say a word at breakfast."

"Ah, but that was all part of the devilish cunning. I hadn't got a present for you then. At least, I didn't know whether it was ready."

"Oh, Archie, you darling!" Lucille's voice had lost its crushed melancholy. She trilled like a thrush, or a linnet, or any bird that goes in largely for trilling. "Have you really got me a present?"

"It's here now. The dickens of a fruity picture. One of J. B. Wheeler's things. You'll like it."

"Oh, I know I shall. I love his work. You are an angel. We'll hang it over the piano."

"I'll be round with it in something under three ticks, star of my soul. I'll take a taxi."

"Yes do hurry! I want to hug you!"

"Right-o!" said Archie. "I'll take two taxis."

It is not far from Washington Square to the Hotel Cosmopolis, and Archie made the journey without mishap. There was a little unpleasantness with the cabman before starting—he, on the prudish plea that he was a married man with a local reputation to keep up, declining at first to be seen in company with the masterpiece.

But, on Archie giving a promise to keep the front of the picture away from the public gaze, he consented to take the job on; and, some ten minutes later, having made his way blushfully through the hotel lobby and endured the frank curiosity of the boy who worked the elevator, Archie entered his suite, the picture under his arm.

He placed it carefully against the wall in order to leave himself more scope for embracing Lucille, and when the joyful reunion—or the sacred scene, if you prefer so to call it, was concluded, he stepped forward to turn it round and exhibit it.

"Why, it's enormous," said Lucille. "I didn't know Mr. Wheeler ever painted pictures that size. When you said it was one of his, I thought it must be the original of a magazine drawing or something like—— Oh!"

Archie had moved back and given her an uninterrupted view of the work of art, and she had started as if some unkindly disposed person had driven a bradawl into her.

"Pretty ripe, what?" said Archie enthusiastically.

Lucille did not speak for a moment. It may have been sudden joy that kept her silent. Or, on the other hand, it may not. She stood looking at the picture with wide eyes and parted lips.

"A bird, eh?" said Archie.

"Y-yes," said Lucille.

"I knew you'd like it," proceeded Archie with animation. "You see, you're by way of being a picture-hound—know all about the things, and what not—inherit it from the dear old dad, I shouldn't wonder. Personally, I can't tell one picture from another as a rule, but I'm bound to say, the moment I set eyes on this, I said to myself 'What ho!' or words to that effect. I rather think this will add a touch of distinction to the home, yes, no? I'll hang it up, shall I? 'Phone down to the office, light of my soul, and tell them to send up a nail, a bit of string, and the hotel hammer."

"One moment, darling. I'm not quite sure."

"Eh?"

"Where it ought to hang, I mean. You see——"

"Over the piano, you said. The jolly old piano."

"Yes, but I hadn't seen it then."

A monstrous suspicion flitted for an instant into Archie's mind.

"I say, you *do* like it, don't you?" he said anxiously.

"Oh, Archie, darling! Of *course* I do! And it was so sweet of you to give it to me. But, what I was trying to say was that this picture

is so—so striking that I feel that we ought to wait a little while and decide where it would have the best effect. The light over the piano is rather strong."

"You think it ought to hang in a dimmish light, what?"

"Yes, yes. The dimmer the—— I mean, yes, in a dim light. Suppose we leave it in the corner for the moment—over there—behind the sofa, and—and I'll think it over. It wants a lot of thought, you know."

"Right-o! Here?"

"Yes, that will do splendidly. Oh, and, Archie."

"Hullo?"

"I think perhaps . . . Just turn its face to the wall, will you?"

Lucille gave a little gulp. "It will prevent it getting dusty."

It perplexed Archie a little during the next few days to notice in Lucille, whom he had always looked on as pre-eminently a girl who knew her own mind, a curious streak of vacillation. Quite half a dozen times he suggested various spots on the wall as suitable for the Venus, but Lucille seemed unable to decide. Archie wished that she would settle on something definite, for he wanted to invite J. B. Wheeler to the suite to see the thing. He had heard nothing from the artist since the day he had removed the picture, and one morning, encountering him on Broadway, he expressed his appreciation of the very decent manner in which the other had taken the whole affair.

"Oh, that!" said J. B. Wheeler. "My dear fellow, you're welcome." He paused for a moment. "More than welcome," he added. "You aren't much of an expert on pictures, are you?"

"Well," said Archie, "I don't know that you'd call me an absolute nib, don't you know, but of course I know enough to see that this particular exhibit is not a little fruity. Absolutely one of the best things you've ever done, laddie."

A slight purple tinge manifested itself in Mr. Wheeler's round and rosy face. His eyes bulged.

"What are you talking about, you Tishbite? You misguided son of Belial, are you under the impression that *I* painted that thing?"

"Didn't you?"

Mr. Wheeler swallowed a little convulsively.

"My fiancée painted it," he said shortly.

"Your fiancée? My dear old lad, I didn't know you were engaged. Who is she? Do I know her?"

"Her name is Alice Wigmore. You don't know her."

"And she painted that picture?" Archie was perturbed. "But, I say! Won't she be apt to wonder where the thing has got to?"

"I told her it had been stolen. She thought it a great compliment, and was tickled to death. So that's all right."

"And, of course, she'll paint you another."

"Not while I have my strength she won't," said J. B. Wheeler firmly. "She's given up painting since I taught her golf, thank goodness, and my best efforts shall be employed in seeing that she doesn't have a relapse."

"But, laddie," said Archie, puzzled, "you talk as though there were something wrong with the picture. I thought it dashed hot stuff."

"God bless you!" said J. B. Wheeler.

Archie proceeded on his way, still mystified. Then he reflected that artists as a class were all pretty weird and rummy and talked more or less consistently through their hats. You couldn't ever take an artist's opinion on a picture. Nine out of ten of them had views on Art which would have admitted them to any looney-bin, and no questions asked. He had met several of the species who absolutely raved over things which any reasonable chappie would decline to be found dead in a ditch with. His admiration for the Wigmore Venus, which had faltered for a moment during his conversation with J. B. Wheeler, returned in all its pristine vigour. Absolute rot, he meant to say, to try to make out that it wasn't one of the ones and just like mother used to make. Look how Lucille had liked it!

At breakfast next morning, Archie once more brought up the question of the hanging of the picture. It was absurd to let a thing like that go on wasting its sweetness behind a sofa with its face to the wall.

"Touching the jolly old masterpiece," he said, "how about it? I think it's time we hoisted it up somewhere."

Lucille fiddled pensively with her coffee-spoon.

"Archie, dear," she said, "I've been thinking."

"And a very good thing to do," said Archie. "I've often meant to do it myself when I got a bit of time."

"About that picture, I mean. Did you know it was father's birthday to-morrow?"

"Why no, old thing, I didn't, to be absolutely honest. Your revered parent doesn't confide in me much these days, as a matter of fact."

"Well, it is. And I think we ought to give him a present."

"Absolutely. But how? I'm all for spreading sweetness and light, and cheering up the jolly old pater's sorrowful existence, but I haven't a bean. And, what is more, things have come to such a pass that I scan the horizon without seeing a single soul I can touch. I suppose I could get into Reggie van Tuyl's ribs for a bit, but—I don't know—touching poor old Reggie always seems to me rather like potting a sitting bird."

"Of course, I don't want you to do anything like that. I was thinking—— Archie, darling, would you be very hurt if I gave father the picture?"

"Oh, I say!"

"Well, I can't think of anything else."

"But wouldn't you miss it most frightfully?"

"Oh, of course I should. But you see—father's birthday——"

Archie had always thought Lucille the dearest and most unselfish angel in the world, but never had the fact come home to him so forcibly as now. He kissed her fondly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You really are, you know! This is the biggest thing since jolly old Sir Philip What's-his-name gave the drink of water to the poor blighter whose need was greater than his, if you recall the incident. I had to sweat it up at school, I remember. Sir Philip, poor old bean, had a most ghastly thirst on, and he was just going to have one on the house, so to speak, when . . . but it's all in the history-books. This is the sort of thing Boy Scouts do! Well, of course, it's up to you, queen of my soul. If you feel like making the sacrifice, right-o! Shall I bring the pater up here and show him the picture?"

"No, I shouldn't do that. Do you think you could get into his suite to-morrow morning and hang it up somewhere? You see, if he had the chance of—what I mean is, if—yes, I think it would be best to hang it up and let him discover it there."

"It would give him a surprise, you mean, what?"

"Yes."

Lucille sighed inaudibly. She was a girl with a conscience, and that conscience was troubling her a little. She agreed with Archie that the discovery of the Wigmore Venus in his artistically furnished suite would give Mr. Brewster a surprise. Surprise, indeed, was perhaps an inadequate word. She was sorry for her father, but the instinct of self-preservation is stronger than any of her emotion.

Archie whistled merrily on the following morning as, having driven a nail into his father-in-law's wallpaper, he adjusted the cord from which the Wigmore Venus was suspended. He was a kind-hearted young man, and, though Mr. Daniel Brewster had on many occasions treated him with a good deal of austerity, his simple soul was pleased at the thought of doing him a good turn. He had just completed his work and was stepping cautiously down, when a voice behind him nearly caused him to over-balance.

"What the devil?"

Archie turned beamingly.

"Hullo, old thing! Many happy returns of the day!"

Mr. Brewster was standing in a frozen attitude. His strong face was slightly flushed.

"What—what——?" he gurgled.

Mr. Brewster was not in one of his sunniest moods that morning. The proprietor of a large hotel has many things to disturb him, and to-day things had been going wrong. He had come up to his suite with the idea of restoring his shaken nerve-system with a quiet cigar, and the sight of his son-in-law had, as so frequently happened, made him feel worse than ever. But, when Archie had descended from the chair and moved aside to allow him an uninterrupted view of the picture, Mr. Brewster realised that a worse thing had befallen him than a mere visit from one who always made him feel that the world was a bleak place.

He stared at the Venus dumbly. Unlike most hotel-proprietors, Daniel Brewster was a connoisseur of Art. Connoisseuring was, in fact, his hobby. Even the public rooms of the Cosmopolis were decorated with taste, and his own private suite was a shrine of all that was best and most artistic. His tastes were quiet and restrained, and it is not too much to say that the Wigmore Venus hit him behind the ear like a stuffed eel-skin.

So great was the shock that for some moments it kept him silent, and before he could recover speech Archie had explained.

"It's a birthday present from Lucille, don't you know."

Mr. Brewster crushed down the breezy speech he had intended to utter.

"Lucille gave me—that?" he muttered.

He swallowed pathetically. He was suffering, but the iron courage of the Brewsters stood him in good stead. This man was no weakling. Presently the rigidity of his face relaxed. He was

himself again. Of all things in the world he loved his daughter most, and if, in whatever mood of temporary insanity, she had brought herself to suppose that this beastly daub was the sort of thing he would like for a birthday present, he must accept the situation like a man. He would on the whole have preferred death to a life lived in the society of the Wigmore Venus, but even that torment must be endured if the alternative was the hurting of Lucille's feelings.

"I think I've chosen a pretty likely spot to hang the thing, what?" said Archie cheerfully. "It looks well alongside those Japanese prints, don't you think? Sort of stands out."

Mr. Brewster licked his dry lips and grinned a ghastly grin.

"It does stand out!" he agreed.

A TALE OF A GRANDFATHER

ARCHIE was not a man who readily allowed himself to become worried, especially about people who were not in his own immediate circle of friends, but in the course of the next week he was bound to admit that he was not altogether easy in his mind about his father-in-law's mental condition. He had read all sorts of things in the Sunday papers and elsewhere about the constant strain to which captains of industry are subjected, a strain which sooner or later is only too apt to make the victim go all blooey, and it seemed to him that Mr. Brewster was beginning to find the going a trifle too tough for his stamina. Undeniably he was behaving in an odd manner, and Archie, though no physician, was aware that, when the American business-man, that restless, ever-active human machine, starts behaving in an odd manner, the next thing you know is that two strong men, one attached to each arm, are hurrying him into the cab bound for Bloomingdale.

He did not confide his misgivings to Lucille, not wishing to cause her anxiety. He hunted up Reggie van Tuyl at the club, and sought advice from him.

"I say, Reggie, old thing—present company excepted—have there been any loonies in your family?"

Reggie stirred in the slumber which always gripped him in the early afternoon.

"Loonies?" he mumbled, sleepily. "Rather! My uncle Edgar thought he was twins."

"Twins, eh?"

"Yes. Silly idea! I mean, you'd have thought one of my uncle Edgar would have been enough for any man."

"How did the thing start?" asked Archie.

"Start? Well, the first thing we noticed was when he began wanting two of everything. Had to set two places for him at dinner and so on. Always wanted two seats at the theatre. Ran into money, I can tell you."

"He didn't behave rummily up till then? I mean to say, wasn't sort of jumpy and all that?"

"Not that I remember. Why?"

Archie's tone became grave.

"Well, I'll tell you, old man, though I don't want it to go any farther, that I'm a bit worried about my jolly old father-in-law. I believe he's about to go in off the deep-end. I think he's cracking under the strain. Dashed weird his behaviour has been the last few days."

"Such as?" murmured Mr. van Tuyl.

"Well, the other morning I happened to be in his suite—incidentally he wouldn't go above ten dollars, and I wanted twenty-five—and he suddenly picked up a whacking big paper-weight and bunged it for all he was worth."

"At you?"

"Not at me. That was the rummy part of it. At a mosquito on the wall, he said. Well, I mean to say, do chappies bung paper-weights at mosquitoes? I mean, is it done?"

"Smash anything?"

"Curiously enough, no. But he only just missed a rather decent picture which Lucille had given him for his birthday. Another foot to the left and it would have been a goner."

"Sounds queer."

"And, talking of that picture, I looked in on him about a couple of afternoons later, and he'd taken it down from the wall and laid it on the floor and was staring at it in a dashed marked sort of manner. That was peculiar, what?"

"On the floor?"

"On the jolly old carpet. When I came in, he was goggling at it in a sort of glassy way. Absolutely rapt, don't you know. My coming in gave him a start—seemed to rouse him from a kind of trance, you know—and he jumped like an antelope; and, if I hadn't happened to grab him, he would have trampled bang on the thing. It was deuced unpleasant, you know. His manner was rummy. He seemed to be brooding on something. What ought I to do about it, do you think? It's not my affair, of course, but it seems to me that, if he goes on like this, one of these days he'll be stabbing someone with a pickle-fork."

To Archie's relief, his father-in-law's symptoms showed no signs of development. In fact, his manner reverted to the normal one more, and a few days later, meeting Archie in the lobby of the hotel, he seemed quite cheerful. It was not often that he wasted his time talking to his son-in-law, but on this occasion he chatted with

him for several minutes about the big picture-robbery which had formed the chief item of news on the front pages of the morning papers that day. It was Mr. Brewster's opinion that the outrage had been the work of a gang, and that nobody was safe.

Daniel Brewster had spoken of this matter with a strange earnestness, but his words had slipped from Archie's mind when he made his way that night to his father-in-law's suite. Archie was in an exalted mood. In the course of dinner he had had a bit of good news which was occupying his thoughts to the exclusion of all other matters. It had left him in a comfortable, if rather dizzy, condition of benevolence to all created things. He had smiled at the room-clerk as he crossed the lobby, and, if he had had a dollar, he would have given it to the boy who took him up in the elevator.

He found the door of the Brewster suite unlocked, which at any other time would have struck him as unusual; but to-night he was in no frame of mind to notice these trivialities. He went in, and, finding the room dark and no one at home, sat down, too absorbed in his thoughts to switch on the lights, and gave himself up to dreamy meditation.

There are certain moods in which one loses count of time, and Archie could not have said how long he had been sitting in the deep arm-chair near the window when he first became aware that he was not alone in the room. He had closed his eyes, the better to meditate, so had not seen anyone enter. Nor had he heard the door open. The first intimation he had that somebody had come in was when some hard substance knocked against some other hard object, producing a sharp sound which brought him back to earth with a jerk.

He sat up silently. The fact that the room was still in darkness made it obvious that something nefarious was afoot. Plainly there was dirty work in preparation at the cross-roads. He stared into the blackness, and, as his eyes grew accustomed to it, was presently able to see an indistinct form bending over something on the floor. The sound of rather stertorous breathing came to him.

Archie had many defects which prevented him being the perfect man, but lack of courage was not one of them. His somewhat rudimentary intelligence had occasionally led his superior officers during the war to thank God that Great Britain had a Navy, but even these stern critics had found nothing to complain

of in the manner in which he bounded over the top. Some of us are thinkers, others men of action. Archie was a man of action, and he was out of his chair and sailing in the direction of the back of the intruder's neck before a wiser man would have completed his plan of campaign. The miscreant collapsed under him with a squashy sound, like the wind going out of a pair of bellows, and Archie, taking a firm seat on his spine, rubbed the other's face in the carpet and awaited the progress of events.

At the end of half a minute it became apparent that there was going to be no counter-attack. The dashing swiftness of the assault had apparently had the effect of depriving the marauder of his entire stock of breath. He was gurgling to himself in a pained sort of way and making no effort to rise. Archie, feeling that it would be safe to get up and switch on the light, did so, and, turning after completing this manoeuvre, was greeted by the spectacle of his father-in-law, seated on the floor in a breathless and dishevelled condition, blinking at the sudden illumination. On the carpet beside Mr. Brewster lay a long knife, and beside the knife lay the handsomely framed masterpiece of J. B. Wheeler's fiancée, Miss Alice Wigmore. Archie stared at this collection dumbly.

"Oh, what-ho!" he observed at length, feebly.

A distinct chill manifested itself in the region of Archie's spine. This could mean only one thing. His fears had been realised. The strain of modern life, with all its hustle and excitement, had at last proved too much for Mr. Brewster. Crushed by the thousand and one anxieties and worries of a millionaire's existence, Daniel Brewster had gone off his onion.

Archie was nonplussed. This was his first experience of this kind of thing. What, he asked himself, was the proper procedure in a situation of this sort? What was the local rule? Where, in a word, did he go from here? He was still musing in an embarrassed and baffled way, having taken the precaution of kicking the knife under the sofa, when Mr. Brewster spoke. And there was in both the words and the method of their delivery so much of his old familiar self that Archie felt quite relieved.

"So it's you, is it, you wretched blight, you miserable weed!" said Mr. Brewster, having recovered enough breath to be going on with. He glowered at his son-in-law despondently. "I might have expected it! If I was at the North Pole, I could count on you butting in!"

"Shall I get you a drink of water?" said Archie.

"What the devil," demanded Mr. Brewster, "do you imagine I want with a drink of water?"

"Well——" Archie hesitated delicately. "I had a sort of idea that you had been feeling the strain a bit. I mean to say, rush of modern life and all that sort of thing——"

"What are you doing in my room?" said Mr. Brewster, changing the subject.

"Well, I came to tell you something, and I came in here and was waiting for you, and I saw some chappie biffing about in the dark, and I thought it was a burglar or something after some of your things, so, thinking it over, I got the idea that it would be a fairly juicy scheme to land on him with both feet. No idea it was you, old thing! Frightfully sorry and all that. Meant well!"

Mr. Brewster sighed deeply. He was a just man, and he could not but realise that, in the circumstances, Archie had behaved not unnaturally.

"Oh, well!" he said. "I might have known something would go wrong."

"Awfully sorry!"

"It can't be helped. What was it you wanted to tell me?" He eyed his son-in-law piercingly. "Not a cent over twenty dollars!" he said coldly.

Archie hastened to dispel the pardonable error.

"Oh, it wasn't anything like that," he said. "As a matter of fact, I think it's a good egg. It has bucked me up to no inconsiderable degree. I was dining with Lucille just now, and, as we dallied with the food-stuffs, she told me something which—well, I'm bound to say, it made me feel considerably braced. She told me to trot along and ask you if you would mind——"

"I gave Lucille a hundred dollars only last Tuesday."

Archie was pained.

"Adjust this sordid outlook, old thing!" he urged. "You simply aren't anywhere near it. Right off the target, absolutely! What Lucille told me to ask you was if you would mind—at some tolerably near date—being a grandfather! Rotten thing to be, of course," proceeded Archie commiseratingly, "for a chappie of your age, but there it is!"

Mr. Brewster gulped. "Do you mean to say——?"

"I mean, apt to make a fellow feel a bit of a patriarch. Snowy

hair and what not. And, of course, for a chappie in the prime of life like you——”

“Do you mean to tell me——? Is this true?”

“Absolutely! Of course speaking for myself, I’m all for it. I don’t know when I’ve felt more bucked. I sang as I came up here——absolutely warbled in the elevator. But you——”

A curious change had come over Mr. Brewster. He was one of those men who have the appearance of having been hewn out of the solid rock, but now in some indescribable way he seemed to have melted. For a moment he gazed at Archie, then, moving quickly forward, he grasped his hand in an iron grip.

“This is the best news I’ve ever had!” he mumbled.

“Awfully good of you to take it like this,” said Archie cordially. “I mean, being a grandfather——”

Mr. Brewster smiled. Of a man of his appearance one could hardly say that he smiled playfully; but there was something in his expression that remotely suggested playfulness.

“My dear old bean,” he said.

Archie started.

“My dear old bean,” repeated Mr. Brewster firmly, “I’m the happiest man in America!” His eye fell on the picture which lay on the floor. He gave a slight shudder, but recovered himself immediately. “After this,” he said, “I can reconcile myself to living with that thing for the rest of my life. I feel it doesn’t matter.”

“I say,” said Archie, “how about that? Wouldn’t have brought the thing up if you hadn’t introduced the topic, but, speaking as man to man, what the dickens *were* you up to when I landed on your spine just now?”

“I suppose you thought I had gone off my head?”

“Well, I’m bound to say——”

Mr. Brewster cast an unfriendly glance at the picture.

“Well, I had every excuse, after living with that infernal thing for a week!”

Archie looked at him, astonished.

“I say, old thing, I don’t know if I have got your meaning exactly, but you somehow give me the impression that you don’t *like* that jolly old work of Art.”

“Like it!” cried Mr. Brewster. “It’s nearly driven me mad! Every time it caught my eye, it gave me a pain in the neck. To-night I felt as if I couldn’t stand it any longer. I didn’t want to

hurt Lucille's feelings by telling her, so I made up my mind I would cut the damned thing out of its frame and tell her it had been stolen."

"What an extraordinary thing! Why, that's exactly what old Wheeler did."

"Who is old Wheeler?"

"Artist chappie. Pal of mine. His fiancée painted the thing, and, when I lifted it off him, he told her it had been stolen. *He* didn't seem frightfully keen on it, either."

"Your friend Wheeler has evidently good taste."

Archie was thinking.

"Well, all this rather gets past me," he said. "Personally, I've always admired the thing. Dashed ripe bit of work. I've always considered. Still, of course, if you feel that way——"

"You may take it from me that I do!"

"Well, then, in that case—— You know what a clumsy devil I am—— You can tell Lucille it was all my fault——"

The Wigmore Venus smiled up at Archie—it seemed to Archie with a pathetic, pleading smile. For a moment he was conscious of a feeling of guilt; then, closing his eyes and hardening his heart, he sprang lightly in the air and descended with both feet on the picture. There was a sound of rending canvas, and the Venus ceased to smile.

"Golly!" said Archie, regarding the wreckage remorsefully.

Mr. Brewster did not share his remorse. For the second time that night he gripped him by the hand.

"My boy!" he quavered. He stared at Archie as if he were seeing him with new eyes. "My dear boy, you were through the war, were you not?"

"Eh? Oh yes! Right through the jolly old war."

"What was your rank?"

"Oh, second lieutenant."

"You ought to have been a general!" Mr. Brewster clasped his hand once more in a vigorous embrace. "I only hope," he added, "that your son will be like you!"

There are certain compliments, or compliments coming from certain sources, before which modesty reels, stunned. Archie's did.

He swallowed convulsively. He had never thought to hear these words from Daniel Brewster.

"How would it be, old thing," he said almost brokenly, "if you and I trickled down to the bar and had a spot of sherbet?"

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